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EVENING THOUGHTS

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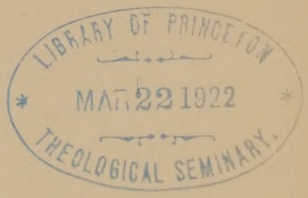
BEING NOTES OF A THREEFOLD PASTORATE



BY THE

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1900

THE FOLLOWING PAPERS

ARE DEDICATED

TO MY THREE PARISHES

BY THEIR

OLD AND ATTACHED

MINISTER.

PREFATORY NOTE

THIS small volume is dedicated to the three parishes, Dunning, Blantyre and Galashiels, in which I laboured as minister, during a period of nearly fifty years.

The thirty papers contained in this book are condensations of sermons delivered during that ministry. They are not arranged in any order either as regards their method or time of delivery, but embrace various subjects both doctrinal and practical.

In selecting these papers, my thoughts have gone back to the people among whom I laboured; in the two first parishes few who heard the discourses now survive.

I am deeply sensible of the imperfection of my pulpit teaching, but I have always endeavoured to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

If these notes recall any good impression made on any of my hearers, I shall feel amply repaid.

PATON J. GLOAG.

EDINBURGH, 1900.

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I

THE TEST OF EXPERIENCE

ONE of the most remarkable characteristics of the age in which we live is its critical and sceptical tendency. Nothing is taken for granted; everything must now be thoroughly sifted. Former opinions are tested and rigidly examined; what we formerly regarded as proved is now called in question; beliefs and creeds and doctrines are now passing through their probation. Our faith is now undergoing a trial, probably unequalled by any which it has hitherto undergone. Mere authority is now of little or no value; it is now regarded as no argument that we believe because our fathers have always believed the same truths, or because such are the opinions of learned and holy men; the old props of reverence, antiquity, and sanctity are now violently torn away. We are now required to prove all things and are called upon to give a reason of the faith that is in us.

It is as useless, as it is unwise, to endeavour to check this freedom of opinion and inquiry. On the contrary, in one point of view, it may be of

immense value and importance, and will ultimately result in good. Men's faith must be shaken, in order that it may be built on some better and surer conviction. We must have some better reason for our Christianity than merely that we happen to be born Christians; that Britain and not Turkey or China is the land of our birth. We must have some surer convictions of the truth than merely taking the doctrines of the Gospel on trust; believing them because such is the creed of the church to which we belong. And it is well to be shaken out of a merely formal and traditionary religion even although the shock should be rude and violent; provided always we be led earnestly to seek the truth, and honestly and sincerely to walk up to the light which we have.

But, on the other hand, it is to be feared that great evils arise from this critical tendency which go far to counterbalance the benefits which may result from it. It has produced a deplorable spirit of unbelief, a latitudinarianism, a religious indifference, a revolt from God, a scoffing temper, a contempt of authority, and a profane levity with respect to religion. Many gladly seize on any objections against the received notions of religion; take the truth of these objections for granted, possibly without thought, without examination, without hearing the opposite side of the question; thus evidently showing that they are already

prejudiced in favour of unbelief, or at least prejudiced against the opinions esteemed orthodox. And thus also it happens that many adopt these objections to serve as excuses to conscience for their indifference to religion and the neglect of its duties; and men will always find excuses when they wish to do what is evil, to persevere in a wrong course, or to disbelieve what they do not wish to believe. Thus it may happen, that in consequence of sceptical doubts and difficulties, many have been confirmed in their indifference to religion, whilst others have been led over to unbelief—not to the scepticism of the honest doubter, but to the unbelief of the heart and to positive aversion to serious religion. The honest doubter will ever speak seriously of religion and his doubts will ever be to him a grief; whereas we often meet with men who glory in their unbelief, and scoff at what is serious and sacred; thus proving that they are under the influence of that "carnal mind which is enmity against God."

There is however no reason to fear for Christianity. The fears of religious men on this point are unfounded and most misjudged. Christianity does not discourage, far less does it shrink from the severest and strictest scrutiny. "Prove all things" is the command of the apostle; and it is the language of a cause which demands and courts inquiry. Let the examination be as strict and

severe, and searching as possible; let all doubts, and objections, and difficulties be fully stated and weighed, provided only the examination be carried on in a candid, honest, and impartial spirit; and that men do not come to the study of the evidences of the truth with preconceived prejudices against it, and are not rash and precipitate in their conclusions; Christianity will come off victorious from every examination; the pure metal will remain, nothing but the earthly mixtures will be consumed. But although we are not in the least afraid for Christianity, it is greatly to be feared that many who are not sufficiently earnest about religion, who it may be are rather indifferent, who are beforehand rather inclined to welcome doubts and who have not sufficient knowledge to meet objections will have their faith disturbed, and may thus be led step by step into the darkness of unbelief, and perhaps it may be even to glory in their belief of a world forsaken by a Sanctifier and a Redeemer.

We must have a personal conviction of the truth of Christianity. As no man can be religious for another, so no man can believe for another. The faith of each will be tried, probably in this world, and certainly in a future state, and for this trial we must be prepared. Hence the importance of personal conviction, that our faith rest on reasons clear and satisfactory to our own conscience at

least, whatever they may be to others. We may not perhaps be able to reason the matter; we may not know how to employ arguments, we may be unskilful in the art of logic, and unable to refute objections; skilfulness in the art of reasoning, though desirable, is not at all necessary. But we ought to be able to say: I believe because I know and feel the truth; I feel it by the effects which it has produced and which it is continuing to produce upon my heart and conduct; Christianity recommends itself as true to my spiritual nature.

The evidences of Christianity are in themselves strong and conclusive; and were it not that here the element of depravity enters in, they would recommend themselves to every reasonable mind, or at least would ultimately do so. If Christianity were a mere formal theory; if it were a system of unpractical doctrines, it would be universally embraced, even as we assent to the facts of credible history or to the propositions of science. But Christianity is not so; it is practical; it demands self-denial and an exalted state of devotion toward God. Now here is the great obstacle to conviction. We have a secret aversion to religious duties; it is painful to deny ourselves; we do not like to mortify our sinful affections; in a word, we are prejudiced against the truth. Hence after all, the test of experience is the only sure and certain test. Let the evidences of Christianity be

as strong and as plain as possible, yet men may reject them, even as the Jews rejected the miracles of the Saviour. But the test of experience is incontrovertible and infallible; then we believe, because we taste and see. This is the test which our Saviour proposes. "Do the will of God, and you shall know of the doctrine." Act up to what you believe, and you will be led to the truth. Just as the efficacy of a remedy is proved by its producing a cure; as the warmth of fire is proved by the heat which it conveys; as the use of sowing in spring is demonstrated by the harvest which is reaped; in short, as almost all things are judged and tested by their effects, so are the efficacy and truth and reality and blessings of the Gospel to be tested by its beneficial and saving effects upon us.

This test is sure, certain, and infallible. The man who experiences the saving effects of the Gospel; who knows what it is to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus; who has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, has in himself a conviction of the truth which no arguments, however subtle, can shake. You might as well attempt to reason that man out of a belief in his own existence as to reason him out of his faith in Christ. I cannot, he may say to his opponents, answer your objections. I cannot reason with you on the subject; but I know from my own experience, that the Gospel is true. As the blind man said to the

Jews, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." It is true that this cannot be brought forward as an argument to persuade others; it cannot be adduced as a reason to convince unbelievers, except indirectly by telling them to do the will of God and then they will have the like experience and conviction. But to the man himself the argument is unanswerable. He not only believes, but he knows and feels the truth. The religion of Jesus is the life of his soul. The doctrine of the Spirit's influence is not merely the belief of his understanding, but of his heart—it is to him a reality, the experience of his soul.

But not only is the evidence arising from experience the most certain of all proofs, it is likewise necessary. A mere speculative belief in Christianity is perhaps perfectly attainable; but if it leads to no practical result it is worse than useless, for it takes away the excuse of ignorance, and classes us among those unfaithful servants who knew their Lord's will and did it not. Christianity is eminently a practical religion; all its doctrines have a practical tendency. Faith must be active or it is of no value. Believing the facts and doctrines of Christianity is the basis of all vital faith; but if this be all, it will come to nothing. Christianity is a remedy; it is not enough to believe in the efficacy of the remedy,

to be able to describe its nature and how it operates, to tell of those who have been cured by it, to extol and recommend it to others; we must apply that remedy to ourselves; we must experience its saving efficacy. It is by actually trusting in Christ, that our faith in Him is strengthened and increased. Faith leads to action and action reacts on faith. Faith worketh experience and experience imparts stronger convictions to faith. The more we live to Christ, the more confidently do we trust in Christ.

And so in all matters of practical opinion it is by action that we confirm ourselves in them. Acting upon our convictions imparts to them all the vividness and strength which experiment does to that which is proved by abstract reasoning. The philanthropist is the man who really believes in the duty of loving our neighbour as ourselves; the honourable are the men who really believe in the eternal maxims of honesty and truth; the diligent are the men who really believe in the value of time. And thus too in religion the active Christian, the man who diligently and conscientiously does the will of God, who endeavours to walk up to the holy precepts of the Gospel, who aims continually at higher attainments in the divine life, who is earnest and sincere in his religion, is evidently the man who truly and really believes in Jesus Christ.

The great requisite is moral earnestness; sincerely and honestly doing what we believe to be the will of God; and that in opposition to insincerity, lukewarmness, formality, and frivolity. There is little cause to fear for earnest-minded men, however confused their notions may at present be. If they do the will of God, that is to say if they walk up to what they know is their duty, if they be honest and true to their convictions, if they conscientiously profit by their opportunities, they will know of the doctrine. If they follow the light which they have, however feeble that light may be, the very light of heaven will shine upon them. They will arrive at clearer views of truth, stronger convictions, and surer hopes. We cannot conceive that our most merciful and loving Father will leave the earnest-minded in hopeless darkness; but that, sooner or later, He will lead them to the truth; yea, He is already leading them, they are under the divine instruction and guidance; for "unto everyone that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

II

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

THE resurrection of Jesus Christ is the great religious question of the day. On this fact the battle between faith and unbelief is being fought. This is the crucial question between Christians and unbelievers. The truth or falsehood of Christianity depends upon it. If Christ be risen, then Christianity is demonstrated to be of supernatural origin, its statements must be received as a revelation from heaven, and men must bow to its supreme authority. If Christ be not risen, then Christianity is a delusion, and must be classed among the false religions of the world.

The apostles founded their claims to be heard as inspired messengers of God on the resurrection of Christ. On the day of Pentecost they assembled in an upper room in Jerusalem and organised themselves into a religious body. They filled up the gap, which had been made in the apostleship by the treachery and death of Judas, by the appointment of Matthias for the express purpose that he should bear witness of the resurrection of

their Master. They proclaimed in the streets of Jerusalem that that Jesus who was crucified on Calvary was risen from the dead. They were transformed from cowards who basely forsook their Master in the hour of His trial into heroes, and when brought before rulers and governors they boldly asserted that the crucified One was risen from the dead. And thus everywhere they preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead. Thus Christianity is founded or took its rise from a fact, an occurrence in the history of the world; not from a mere speculation, or dogma, or opinion, or system, but from a plain and palpable matter of fact, whether or not Jesus Christ of Nazareth rose from the dead.

If the resurrection of Christ were untrue, if it were a mere fabrication, or delusion, or myth, then Christianity would have been at once and for ever extinguished. The disciples of Jesus who had embraced His cause when He was in this world would themselves have been the first to relinquish it. The death of their Master had disappointed all their expectations; they had already forsaken Him on His arrest, and nothing could possibly have revived their hopes but His resurrection. If untrue, they must have felt that they were a company of deluded men, like those Jews who at that period from time to time followed a false Messiah. But even were this not the case, if they

had formed the resolution to promulgate the doctrines of their Master, and in order to enforce their views to assert that He had risen from the dead, it is perfectly evident that they could not possibly have succeeded, unless the assertion which they made were true. Observe, they make the proclamation that Christ was risen in the very city where a few weeks before He was crucified, in the presence of the very people who saw Him expire and buried, before the very rulers who had been the agents of His crucifixion. It was the interest of these rulers to refute the fact, and if untrue they could easily have done so; they had only to produce the dead body of Christ to dispel the delusion. But except the story of the disciples coming by night and stealing away the body whilst the soldiers slept, a story which bears the evident stamp of absurdity, they made no such attempt; they scourge, they imprison the apostles; they charge them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. Like men who know themselves to be in the wrong they employ force and violence for arguments; but they do not deny the fact, they do not attempt to refute the resurrection of Christ.

But it is said that all that is necessary to account for the rise and existence of Christianity is the belief, and not necessarily the fact of the resurrection of Christ. But no cause can be assigned for this belief, but the reality of the fact

—that not only in opinion but in truth, Christ rose from the dead. The supposition that the apostles fabricated this fact and imposed it upon the world, knowing it to be false, is too absurd to be maintained by any in the present day; the apostles at least proved the sincerity of their belief by the sacrifice of their lives; they sealed their testimony with their blood. Men have become martyrs for false opinions which they hold to be true, but not for false facts which they assert to have seen and which they know to be untrue. Equally absurd is the supposition that the apostles were enthusiasts, led astray by their own impressions, mistaking visions and dreams and the fancies of a disordered imagination for realities. The fact which they testified was plain and palpable, not visionary and illusive. They asserted that they handled the body of the risen Jesus, that they conversed with Him, that they ate and drank with Him, that they saw the print of the nails and the wound which the spear made in His side; circumstances which cannot by any possibility be accounted for on the supposition of fanaticism on the part of the disciples. It has also been asserted that the belief of Christ's resurrection was an aftergrowth in the Church; that its origin was mythical, in order to attribute to the Founder of Christianity those wonderful actions which the heathen attributed to their

gods. But to this it has only to be replied, that the rise of myths in the Christian Church supposes the previous existence of the Church, and we have to ask what assignable cause can account for this previous existence except the belief in the resurrection of Christ—a belief which, according to the above supposition, occurred after the Church had existed. In short, no possible reason can be assigned for the belief in Christ's resurrection but its reality — that Christ actually rose from the dead as the apostles attested.

Thus then the very existence of the Church of Christ is a demonstration of His resurrection; if Christ had not risen, Christianity would in a few years have been extinguished; the power of Christ's resurrection is seen in the continued existence and diffusion of His religion. Do we require a proof that Christ is risen? Let us open our eyes and behold the Church of Christ. The resurrection of Christ is the great crowning miracle. Here the supernatural must be admitted; none can raise the dead but God; and therefore, Christ being risen, the intervention of a supernatural Agent cannot be denied. Here we see the truth of Christianity; its very existence in the world is a demonstration of that truth; for that existence is founded on the reality of Christ's resurrection. And further, if once the miracle of Christ's resurrection be admitted, there

is then no more question about the reality of the supernatural in Christianity, there is no more reason for calling in question the other miracles in the Gospels, or for cavilling at the incidents in the life of our Lord. Our belief is thus founded on a rock like a fortress, unassailable by the attacks of enemies; Christianity exists, and it would never have existed had Christ not risen.

Our opinion of Jesus Christ, our notion of His character and nature, must differ essentially according as we do or do not believe in the reality of His resurrection. If we do not believe that He rose from the dead, then He must appear to us as a mere man, pre-eminent indeed by the loftiness of His character and the sublimity of His teaching, but without anything supernatural; a great moral reformer and corrector of the abuses of His age. But if we admit the truth of His resurrection, then His supernatural dignity follows as a matter of course; He is not only endowed with superhuman powers, but is of a different order from the human race. "He is," says St Paul, "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead." It is true that there are in Scripture records of others who were raised from the dead; but there was nothing remarkable about them; in themselves they were not notable persons at all; and they were raised by the instrumentality of others. But

Jesus Christ is the most wonderful Being who ever trod this earth; and He rose from the dead, not by any human instrumentality, but directly by the power of God. He is thus Himself the Resurrection and the Life; that supernatural Being who lived in this earth and yet was not of it; that Bread of Life who came down from heaven. The shame of the Cross was removed by the glory of His resurrection. His enemies nailed Him to the accursed tree, whilst God placed Him on the throne of eternal glory. His enemies crowned Him with thorns, whilst God prepared for Him many crowns. His enemies numbered Him with transgressors, whilst God placed Him at His own right hand in heavenly places. His enemies laid Him in the sepulchre of Joseph, whilst God raised Him from the dead and invested Him with the sceptre of universal dominion.

We are living in a highly sceptical age; our faith is attacked on every side; objections are continually advanced against Christianity; and we meet with many who openly profess their infidelity. But, as we have already remarked, the very existence of Christianity is a proof of its divinity, for it is founded on the resurrection of Christ; if Christ had not risen, Christianity would long ago have perished. If this be the case Christianity must be true; it is attested by the

crowning miracle of Christ's resurrection. The Church of Christ is a living proof that Christ has risen. And having convinced ourselves of the truth of Christianity, we need not greatly trouble ourselves with those objections which we meet with; they cannot possibly affect the foundation, We are not to be always looking at the grounds of our faith, like scholars always learning the alphabet; but being once thoroughly convinced of the truth of Christianity, we are to act up to our convictions. There may be difficulties which we cannot remove, objections which we cannot answer, questions which we cannot solve; but if we believe in the reality of Christ's resurrection, all these difficulties and objections and questions are overcome, or at least they do not concern us; for we know the truth and the truth has made us free.

III

THE CARNAL MIND ENMITY AGAINST GOD

In the Epistle to the Romans St Paul asserts that the soul of man is in a state of moral disunion. There are within it two principles or laws; there is the "law of the mind" or the higher principle, and there is the "law in the members" or the lower principle; and these laws or principles are antagonistic, so that there is a continual struggle between good and evil. There is the conflict between reason and passion. On the one hand, reason and conscience reveal and approve the good—make known and enforce the practice of virtue; and on the other hand, passion and inclination tempt to evil—hurry a man along in defiance of the light of reason and the protestations of conscience and lead to the practice of vice. But most probably, not of this conflict, but of another and somewhat similar conflict does the apostle speak—the conflict between grace and corruption, or as he expresses it, between the spirit and the flesh in the renewed soul. On the

one hand grace excites to do good, and on the other hand corruption tempts to do evil; the one exalts the soul to the liberty of the sons of God, the other renders it the slave of the appetites and passions. Between these two laws or principles there is a conflict; even the regenerate soul is in a state of moral discord; "for the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary, the one to the other."

The term *flesh* is used in various senses in Scripture, sometimes for animal life in general, but most frequently for the human race. It is used by St Paul for corrupt human nature, or rather for that element of depravity which has involved the human race in sin. Man, by the fall, has become subject to depravity; "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;" he is under the dominion of that carnal mind which is enmity against God. The flesh then is our corrupt nature. Now in this flesh there is no spiritual good; it is wholly, radically, and thoroughly sinful. "I know that in me that is in my flesh," says the apostle, "dwelleth no good thing." And thus it happens that so long as we are governed by the flesh, so long as this is the prevailing principle, we can do nothing that is acceptable to God; we are under the law of sin and of death. We produce in our lives the

works of the flesh and these are the direct opposite of the fruits of the spirit. At the same time it must not be thought that the flesh is in itself something positive, existing in the soul, something superadded to the natural faculties and affections of the mind; it is rather a perversion of our spiritual nature. The same faculties and affections are in the regenerate and the unregenerate; but in the unregenerate they are abnormal, diseased, perverted. So also the religious nature is not extinguished by the carnal mind but is either perverted or lies dormant in the soul.

Opposed to the flesh is the spirit, and as the flesh is the law or principle of sin so the spirit is the law or principle of holiness. The flesh constitutes our corrupt nature; the spirit constitutes our renewed nature. The term *spirit*, as here employed by the apostle, is not so much the Holy Spirit as that spiritual nature which is the result of His divine influences and which is formed in the souls of the regenerate. It is the law of the mind, the principle of good in the soul. And as the flesh is the perversion of our moral faculties and affections, so the spirit is their restoration to moral health, their being restored to holiness and God. The religious nature which is characteristic of the human race is quickened into life, purified from perversion, and sanctified by the Spirit of God. A new disposition is implanted

within the heart of the regenerate, a spiritual mind which is life and peace.

But although a new nature, the spirit, is implanted in the regenerate, yet the old nature, the flesh, is not uprooted. Thus in the regenerate there exist two opposing natures; the soul is in a state of moral discord; there are two principles, the flesh and the spirit, striving for the mastery. Between these two laws or principles there is a constant unremitting conflict, a struggle for the mastery, and sometimes the one and sometimes the other obtains the victory. There is thus in the soul of the regenerate "a company of two armies," the one army marshalling under its banner all sinful passions such as envy, wrath, covetousness, worldliness, licentiousness, and the other army marshalling all the good principles and affections restored and purified, love, faith, hope, unselfishness, honesty, truth. In this warfare the spirit shall at length obtain the victory, the spiritual nature implanted by the Spirit of God will not only never be overborne by the powers of evil, but will finally triumph and prevail. So that every regenerate soul will at the close of life, if not in this world yet in the next, have reason to say, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The essential difference which there is between the regenerate and the unregenerate may be here

seen. Negatively, this difference does not consist in the presence of the carnal mind in the unregenerate and in its absence in the regenerate. The carnal mind does still exist in the regenerate. If you call in question the religion of professed Christians on account of the defects and inconsistencies seen in their character and conduct, you are proceeding on a false idea of human holiness, you are demanding more of believers than you have any right to demand. It needs no spiritual microscope to discover imperfections in the characters of believers; these are only too evident. But the great difference consists in the state of the will, in the bent of the inclination. In the unregenerate the will is on the side of evil; the man has an inclination to sin; he has a taste and relish for carnal objects. In the regenerate, on the contrary, the will is on the side of good; the man has an inclination to holiness; sin is the object of his aversion, he has a taste and relish for spiritual objects.

Were we to examine more closely we would find that so far is the carnal mind from being destroyed in the regenerate, that its presence is more clearly discerned and its power more keenly felt. It requires two parties to make a conflict so long as the carnal mind is predominant there is comparative peace; but whenever an opposing principle—the spiritual mind—is implanted there

is conflict. So far are the regenerate from being filled with a feeling of self-righteousness or satisfaction, there is within them a deepening sense of sin; they feel the power and the evil of their sins as they never felt them before, they see evils which formerly they were not aware did exist. When a room is kept in darkness, the filth and pollutions which are in it are hardly discerned; but when the light of heaven is let in upon that room, then we discern the cobwebs and the dust and the filth which cover it. Thus is it with the human heart; so long as there is no principle of good the evil is not perceived, but whenever the spiritual nature is imparted then sin is discerned. It is the light of truth let in upon the soul that first discovers to the man the pollutions that lurk there. Then sin is clearly seen and felt to be sin; then the law in the members wars against the law of the mind; then a feeling of imperfection weighs heavily upon the spirit, and the man for the first time knows and feels that he is a sinner.

"The carnal mind," says the apostle, "is enmity against God." A truly awful description of human depravity. Enmity against God—hatred toward the greatest, the best, the holiest of Beings—toward our best Friend and greatest Benefactor—toward that God in whose hand our life is and whose are all our ways—toward Him who is our King and Judge, and from whom none can deliver. Not

merely indifference to God, not merely forgetfulness of God, not merely revolt from God; but positive enmity against God, looking with aversion upon the ever blessed God, "haters of God" as the apostle expresses it. This is the blackest form human wickedness can assume. If to love God with all our heart is the perfection of holiness; to entertain enmity against God must be the climax of wickedness.

This enmity against God may be seen in a dread of God. There is in sinful man a dread of God; he dreads the avenging arm; he fears that he may on account of his sins be cast into hell. Hence his attempts to banish the thought of God from his mind; to stifle his religious nature, to silence the voice of conscience. Hence the eagerness with which he betakes himself to business, to pleasure, to work, to anything which would cause him to forget God. God is regarded not as a loving and merciful Father who smiles upon His children, corrects them for their faults, and restores them to His favour when penitent; but as an implacable judge who is strict to mark iniquity and rigorous to punish, as a hard creditor who demands from his debtors the payment of the last farthing.

This enmity against God is seen in an aversion to evangelical preaching. "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness." To tell a man who is comfortable and satisfied with his

condition that he is in a state of total depravity; that in him there is no good thing; that he is exposed to wrath and in a state of condemnation, is no welcome news. To announce to him that he must be born again before he can see the Kingdom of God; that his disposition must be radically changed; that he must be raised from a state of spiritual death; that it is the Spirit that quickeneth the flesh profiteth nothing, must be to him, as it was to the Jews, a hard saying. The preaching that pleases is not a fearless exhibition of the doctrines of grace, above all not a declaration of the terrors of the law, but a modification and smoothing and softening of these truths, putting them in the background. Men do not come to church to be alarmed, to have their conscience aroused, and their sins brought to their remembrance. And in this aversion to evangelical preaching we have a symptom of that carnal mind which is enmity against God.

This enmity against God is seen in a hatred to holiness, and in a secret and unacknowledged aversion to vital godliness; and in an antagonism to an exalted Christianity. Persons who are remarkable for the holiness and purity of their character must command the respect of worldly men; but they do not secure affection; they are too much living monitors, standing memorials of men's shortcomings and deserts; and men do not

like to be constantly reminded of their faults and inferiority.

This enmity against God is seen in a secret joy and satisfaction at the triumph of evil. This is the real reason of much of the feelings and conduct of worldly men. Thus they dwell upon the sins of religious persons; they magnify their failures; they glory in their inconsistencies; they convert their frailties into faults, and their faults into crimes; and even when they can see nothing to find fault with they make up for this by insinuating unworthy motives.

What we each require, whatever our spiritual state may be, whether influenced by the spiritual or the carnal mind, is personal revival. Every one of us must groan being burdened with a heavy load of depravity. It is not so much that we are guilty of such and such sins; it is not so much our positive sins of omission and commission that trouble us; but that load of depravity which is crushing us down to the dust. "When we would do good, evil is present with us." When we form resolutions to live holier and purer lives, we fail to put them into practice; "to will is present with us, but how to perform that which is good we find not." We wish to make progress, but we are drawn backward. We try to run, but we soon stumble and fall. We wish to soar with the wings of faith and love, but our souls cleave

to the dust. Like the lark in the cage in attempting to mount we only beat against the bars of our prison. "Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?" Come thou Spirit of the living God, and impart strength and life and vigour within us. It is not in ourselves, not in our own resolutions or endeavours, that we can obtain the victory, but in the strength of Christ. The strong Son of God is mightier far than all our enemies; let us trust in Him; let us throw ourselves upon Him; and armed with His strength and supported by His Spirit we shall at length obtain the victory; the flesh shall wax weaker and weaker and the spirit stronger and stronger. And in heaven the victory will be complete; the carnal mind will be destroyed; no obstacles will impede our progress in holiness; we shall be for ever delivered from the bondage of corruption, "from sin for ever free and clothed in spotless purity, redeeming love adore."

IV

JUDAH PUNISHED FOR THE SINS OF MANASSEH

We are informed that the calamities which befel the Kingdom of Judah—the captivity in Babylon, the destruction of the glorious temple of Solomon, the extinction of the royal line of David, the total eclipse of the nation,—were traceable to the sins of Manasseh. Notwithstanding the reformation effected by Josiah, the anger of the Lord was not removed; the sins of Manasseh were still pressing heavily upon Judah; the innocent blood which he shed was calling aloud for vengeance. And certainly the sins of Manasseh were most heinous, so that considering their greatness we do not wonder that they were followed by national destruction. He was perhaps the most abandoned of the kings of Judah. He erected altars for Baal in the temple of the Lord; he sacrificed his children to false gods; he slew the prophets of the Lord; in the emphatic words of Scripture he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. No wonder at all that such enormities should draw down the

vengeance of heaven. But what is specially noticeable is that these sins of Manasseh were forgiven sins. Manasseh had repented and was forgiven. He is one of the most striking examples of the greatness of divine grace. "When he was in affliction he besought the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him, and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication and brought him again to Jerusalem into his Kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God." And yet forgiven though they were, God took vengeance on them; Manasseh was pardoned, but the effects of his sins remained; he himself was restored, but the nation which he had corrupted was ruined; the innocent blood with which he filled Jerusalem was only expiated by the heart's blood of the nation.

And observe that these consequences followed long after the death of Manasseh. The sins were not punished immediately on their commission; Manasseh, the perpetrator of them, had died in peace; about forty years intervened between the commission of these sins and the vengeance which overtook them; a generation of men had passed away; Manasseh appears to have sown a plenteous crop of wrath which however was not reaped until another generation. The sins of the grandfather fell upon the head of his virtuous and pious grandson.

Not only was Judah punished for the forgiven sins of Manasseh and that long after his death, but this punishment occurred after or even in the midst of the reformation effected by Josiah. This pious monarch had set himself to the task of reforming his country; it was no partial reformation which he desired to effect; there was a thoroughness, an earnestness about his character; he threw his soul into the work which he had given himself to do—to uproot the monuments of idolatry, to restore the worship of God to reform Jewish society, to put down the prophets of Baal. He was the purest character who sat on the throne of Judah. Yet it was of no avail; the goodness of Josiah did not atone for the wickedness of Manasseh.

And yet there is nothing unaccountable in all this. There is no contradiction between the statements that Manasseh's sins were pardoned, and that long after his death Judah was punished on account of them. There is no diminution or denial of the divine mercy in the fact that the national reformation under Josiah did not cause the Lord to turn from the fierceness of His wrath. When rightly considered, it is what we would have expected; the connection between Manasseh's sins and Judah's punishment was no arbitrary connection, it was the result of the laws of God's moral government. Manasseh by his wickedness

had corrupted Judah. He had done what he could to uproot religion and to plant idolatry, vice, immorality, national wickedness, and he had succeeded too well. The nation was corrupted to the core ; its religion was extinct ; its moral courage was weakened ; it had become degenerate, sensual, corrupt, rotten. Manasseh on his repentance attempted to undo what he had done, but he completely failed ; his former bad life destroyed the moral influence of his character. Josiah, with better prospects of success, attempted the same thing ; but he too failed ; the task was too heavy for him ; and he died in the flower of his age with the work undone. All that he could effect was a mere external reformation ; he could not infuse life into the dead carcass ; he might force men to appear religious, but he could not force them to be religious. And so it was after the restraints of his rule were removed, there was a reaction in favour of impiety ; king, nobles and people again fell back to their former ways. The sins of Manasseh had like poison polluted the nation's blood. It is easy to corrupt ; Manasseh had little difficulty in inciting Judah to sin. But it is not easy to reform ; neither Manasseh with his penitential nor Josiah with his purer zeal could undo the evil that was done.

The lesson which we learn from this incident of sacred history is a very solemn and serious one.

Under the moral government of God sin of itself naturally produces misery; there are punishments attached to it. With regard to some sins this is very apparent. The dissipated man, who will not refrain from the intoxicating cup, will reap as the punishment of his crime paralysed and shattered nerves; the dishonest man is punished with the loss of credit; the false man forfeits the confidence of his fellow-men; and the spendthrift brings poverty and wretchedness on himself and family. All these are the natural effects of sin. And such natural effects are much more numerous than we either know or suspect. Many diseases which afflict particular persons may be traced back to sins committed, some of them to sins committed by their ancestors, many of them to sins done by themselves. Thus did our Lord on several occasions trace the origin of disease. When He cured the infirm man who had lain thirty and eight years at the pool of Bethesda waiting in vain for the mysterious movement of the waters, He said unto him, "Behold thou art made whole; sin no more lest a worse thing come unto thee;" thus evidently implying that some particular sin committed thirty and eight years ago was the cause of his infirmity. So also He said to the man sick of the palsy, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee," words which receive their full meaning on the supposition that this palsy

was connected with the commission of some particular sin. In both these cases Jesus traces the disease to sin. Physicians may have given a different account of the matter; they may have looked for the cause in some bodily derangement, but our Lord saw deeper, and no doubt the consciences of these two men told them that our Lord was right.

Now these natural effects of sin are as regards this life in general permanent. The guilt of sin may for the sake of Christ be forgiven a man on his repentance; and yet the natural consequences of his sin may not be removed. He who has ruined his health by dissipation will not by repentance restore steadiness to his shaking limbs, and strength to his shattered constitution, and manly vigour to his weakened frame. The palsied man, whose palsy is the effect of intemperance, cannot now, on his forgiveness, like the paralytic man in the Gospel, take up his bed and walk; he must carry the effects of his sin with him to the grave. He who has wasted his fortune by riotous living will not recover his riches by amendment of life. After a series of dishonest deeds a man may never again be trusted, however sincerely he confess and deplore his dishonesty; the loss of virtue can seldom be recovered; a character once lost and blasted can seldom be regained; society once outraged will not receive those whom it has banished.

We have to reflect not only on the natural effects of sin but on its moral effects; its deteriorating influence on the character. Sin is not a mere isolated action; not an action which being done is done and leaves no prejudicial effects on the person who has committed it. On the contrary it perpetuates itself; it takes root in the soul. The sinner feels that he has fallen—that he has lost his innocence, his nobleness, his manliness—and become degraded, sunk, deteriorated, less capable of moral resistance, weakened in his moral capacities, and it often happens that one sin leads to another. A lie frequently requires a second lie to cover its commission; quarrels perpetuate themselves by retaliation; slander is forced to justify itself by repeated acts of evil speaking; and one deed of dishonesty, if undetected, emboldens the criminal to commit another. Thus sin perpetuates itself; the powers of resistance are weakened; the second sin is more easily committed than the first; conscience becomes less loud in its warnings and less delicate in its sensibilities; habits of sin are formed, and thus the whole moral nature becomes corrupt and depraved.

And even pardoned sin has this effect; it deteriorates character. The sins to which a man was especially addicted in his unconverted state—whether they be pride, intemperance, falsehood, want of reverence, sensuality, meanness, dishonesty

—are the very sins to which he will be most easily tempted in his converted state. The habits of sin are not broken off all at once. Conversion is not a transformation, but a new birth, the implanting of the principles of a new life. And so also when a Christian falls into sin, although restored, yet he will be liable to fall again into a similar sin; his character on that point is weakened; here he is most easily tempted. Wilful sin does not leave the Christian as it found him; although overcome by him, although he rises victorious in the conflict, yet he rises hurt and wounded. Doubtless a man may by watchfulness and prayer and dependence on divine grace do much to counteract these evil effects; his very fall into a particular sin may put him on his guard throughout after life against the same sin; but still the very fact that special efforts are necessary to guard against it prove the weakening influence of sin. And although there have been a few instances in point, some rare exceptions, as St Augustine, there is not a more false maxim, a greater perversion of the grace of God, than to affirm that a great sinner when converted becomes a great saint; as if evil habits were at once uprooted; as if conversion were some magical work, and not the beginning of a growth in holiness. A good moral character before conversion gives a man an advantage which is not possessed by a wicked reprobate. Manasseh is certainly not

for a moment to be compared in point of holiness either with his father Hezekiah or his grandson Josiah; his influence for good was probably very limited.

A wicked man may by the grace of God be converted; he may be restored to the divine favour; his sins may be forgiven him; but the injuries which these sins have inflicted on others —their evil consequences upon his fellow-men, the ruin of character they have brought upon the partners of his guilt, these are permanent. Manasseh's great crimes were forgiven him; but the evils which he had done could not be remedied—his country was ruined. As the sins of Manasseh were the cause of the punishment of Judah, so our sins may be the cause of the ruin of others, and thus evil may perpetuate itself; long after our death our evil works may live; as with Manasseh so with us repentance will not avail to remedy the past.

We may learn the true nature of pardon. There are many false views of pardon which we would do well to get rid of. Pardon does not consist in the obliteration of sin as if the sins had never occurred; this is impossible; sins committed are part of the history of the past; they cannot be thus obliterated; they are done and cannot be undone. Nor does pardon consist in dealing with a man as if he had never sinned;

this would be a legal fiction, the very act of pardon presupposes sin. Nor further does pardon consist in the removal of the natural consequences of sin; this is not and cannot be the case under the moral government of God. But by pardon we mean the remission of the punitive effects of sin. There is a curse attached to sin, a future penalty. Now when the sinner is pardoned this curse is removed, this penalty is remitted; the sinner is restored to the favour of God, he is in a state of grace, he is accepted for the sake of the merits of Christ, and he shall not finally come into condemnation. And further in immediate connection with this pardon, holiness is implanted within him; his heart is changed, the Holy Spirit sanctifies his nature, and he produces in his life the fruits of the Spirit. We must never forget that under the Gospel, pardon and holiness are inseparably connected; none are restored to the favour of God except they who are restored to His image.

The subject of meditation in this paper, the perpetuity of sin, is a very dark and mysterious one. It is indeed a pleasing idea to suppose the annihilation of sin, the complete triumph of holiness, the restoration of all beings to God, the final redemption of the universe. But we see no symptoms of this. On the contrary we find in sin a strong tendency to perpetuate itself.

Wicked men, instead of getting better, grow worse. The evil consequences of sins committed extend from generation to generation. This is a great mystery—very dark and very perplexing. Sin itself is a dark element which obscures from us the light of truth; it belongs to the kingdom of darkness. Its origin is utterly incomprehensible, and its eternity is an enigma equally unsolvable. Here if anywhere we must submit our reason to our faith. Well would it be for us without any further questionings as to the origin of evil to adopt the maxim of an old divine, "One thing I know; evil exists and there is a way to escape it; here I begin and here I end."

V

PARTAKING OF OTHER MEN'S SINS

ST PAUL states a very solemn truth when he declares that we may be partakers of other men's sins; that the crimes committed by others may be chargeable upon us; that a portion at least of their guilt may be laid to our account; and that we are answerable, not only for our own sins, but also for the sins of others.

This is an important point of practical religion, a point which is too often forgotten and overlooked. It requires to be placed before us in order to be realised. Our conscience is comparatively sensitive as regards our own sins, but it is too often dull and insensible as regards our accountability for the actions of others.

It is perfectly obvious that we are to a very considerable extent partakers of those sins into the commission of which we have enticed others. Here an active influence is put forth. We designedly and deliberately tempt men to evil. Most evidently this is sin and sin of a heinous

nature; we not only ruin our own souls, but do all in our power to ruin the souls of others. So also we are guilty when we countenance sin; when we look upon it with a favourable eye, lessen its enormities, and call its excesses the follies of youth. All those sins to which we have tempted men will be laid to our account, we in tempting them took an active share in their commission. The sins of the seduced will return upon the head of the seducer; the tempter will be called to account for the crimes of the tempted.

We are partakers of other men's sins, when we set before them an evil example. The pernicious influence of a bad example is admitted by all. It is like a pestilential vapour which diffuses disease and death over whole districts, for no pestilence is more contagious than wickedness. Men are naturally inclined to evil, and the bad example of others, especially of those to whom they are inclined to look up, encourages them in its commission. But this evil influence not only belongs to the bad example of wicked men, but also to the inconsistencies of professing Christians. By these inconsistencies injury is done to religion, its cause is damaged in the world. When a professing Christian is guilty of a deliberate sin, when he commits an act of dishonesty or utters an untruth, the influence of such conduct is most

pernicious. Men do not or will not distinguish between the character of Christianity and the character of those who profess it; but they lay the inconsistencies of Christians to the charge of religion, and the name of Christ is dishonoured in the world.

So also our example is pernicious, when we make a wrong use of that liberty which Christ has conferred upon us. We may have attained to a certain degree of Christian liberty; we may have risen superior to mere external forms. Now certainly we ought to preserve this liberty, and not to be again enslaved by vain scruples; but at the same time we must exercise it with charity; we must often yield to what we consider the weaknesses of others. No exact rules can be laid down; Christian principle and not mere laws must regulate our conduct. On some occasions we ought to yield to the prejudices of others, and on other occasions it is our duty to resist them. Thus St Paul out of deference to the Jews circumcised Timothy; but, when he saw that such yielding would endanger the liberty of the Gentiles, he refused to circumcise Titus. Young Christians are in general zealous and ardent, but their zeal is often unenlightened and their ardour is devoid of liberty. There are many things which an enlightened Christian regards as indifferent, which they look upon as sinful. Now, if

by our persuasion or example we lead them to do these things, we wound their conscience and cause them to commit sin. The action may be innocent to us, but it is sinful to them. Thus in the days of the apostles a weak Christian thought it sinful to eat food offered in sacrifice to idols; an enlightened Christian, esteeming all food as morally indifferent, saw no sin in it; but still it was the duty of the enlightened Christian to abridge his liberty and to abstain lest he should offend his weak brother. So also like occasions happen in our days; actions which some regard as indifferent, others look on as sinful. In such matters there are two general rules which should regulate our conduct. The one is, let all things be done with charity, respecting the scruples of others; and the other is, let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind as to the lawfulness of what he does.

Another instance of being partakers of other men's sins is when we carelessly perform those duties which are laid upon us. All the evils which arise from our neglect or remiss performance of our duties will be laid to our account, and for this evident reason that they arise from our carelessness. Parents are often partakers of the sins of their children; masters will be called to account for the sins of their servants; husbands for those of their wives, and wives for those of their husbands. In short, all of us, whatever our

duties may be, have reason to fear that in the performance of these duties we have grievously come short.

And this especially applies to those duties which are incumbent upon us as Christians. Not merely by our inconsistencies, but by our religious lukewarmness, we injure religion. The cause of Christ is committed to our charge. By our fervency we advance that cause; by our coldness we retard it. How often is the love of the young Christian chilled by the coldness of those whom he looks on as advanced Christians! When he expects to meet with sympathy, he encounters only indifference; and when he tries to introduce religious conversation he finds no encouragement. And not only so, but his own zeal and love are apt to grow cold by reason of the chilling atmosphere with which he is surrounded. Instead of raising the tone of the religious circle in which he moves, his own religion may sink down to a level with it; one uniform temperature of religious coldness may prevail.

We are made partakers of other men's sins when we forbear to warn them. It is our Christian duty to warn others and if possible to keep them from sin. Compassion should lead us to do so in order to save others from sin and wrath and hell. No doubt this is a very difficult and delicate duty, a duty which we do not like to perform and would

gladly avoid, a duty the performance of which is apt to give offence and to estrange our friends. There are very few who can take reproof meekly and thankfully. Hence great prudence and forbearance are necessary. Very much depends upon the manner in which the warning or reproof is given. If it is given with an air of superiority and not with kindness, its effect will only be to irritate. To be always finding fault as if we ourselves were perfect and beyond reproof, or as if we were always in the right and others always in the wrong, can only have the effect of cooling affection and destroying confidence. And then there is St Paul's question: "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" Thou who art so ready to give reproof, art thou beyond it? And if not, in what spirit dost thou thyself take reproof? In short, we should reprove with all long-suffering, remembering our own weaknesses and with love desiring only the benefit of others.

These observations may be applied to the great Christian duty of seeking the salvation of others. This is the duty of all professing Christians, and the neglect of it is a heinous sin for which we must give an account. "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not, doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? And He that keepeth thy soul, doth

not He know it, and shall not He render to every man according to his works?" The souls of our intimate friends and acquaintances are especially committed to our charge; our influence over them is to be exerted in the cause of Christ. And if, indeed, we are at all sensible of the value of the soul, the awfulness of its being lost, and its extreme danger, compassion will excite us to do all that we can to bring others to Christ, and to rescue them from the miseries of perdition. Here the greatest Christian prudence is necessary. We may by our inconsiderate zeal do the opposite of what we intend; we may give offence and throw obstacles in the way; we may irritate and so prejudice the minds of our friends against religion.

Think on our responsibility for the actions of others. We are apt to forget this; it is a part of practical religion much overlooked. We think that we are only responsible for our own sins, but that with the sins of others we have nothing to do. We have our own burdens to bear, and these surely are heavy enough without increasing their weight with the burdens of others. And so doubtless they are. Our own sins are a heavy burden; but perhaps we have a heavier burden to bear in the sins of others; perhaps a greater number of sins committed by others are chargeable to our account than those which we have personally committed. At the Day of Judgment,

when we stand before the tribunal of our God and King, and when the question is put to us, Where is such a one, thy brother or thy sister, it will not do to reply with Cain, Am I my brother's keeper? Am I accountable for other men's sins? Where is thy brother? If thou hadst warned him when his conscience was tender, if thou hadst directed him to the Saviour when his soul was impressed, if, instead of repressing his religious convictions and mocking at them as the effects of enthusiasm, thou hadst fostered and cherished them, he might have been saved. Where is thy brother? If thou hadst encouraged him by a holy and consistent walk, if thou hadst strengthened his virtuous resolutions, if thou hadst watched over him with a brother's care, he would now have been at My right hand.

Let us reflect on the extreme awfulness of this responsibility. It is a solemn consideration to think that we are influencing the characters of others and fixing their future destiny; that others are induced to commit sins through our pernicious influence; that we may have been the cause of some men's perdition. When we seriously think on this, we are apt to wish that our character had been wholly negative; that we had never done either good or evil; that our influence had been entirely neutral. But it is not, it cannot be.

And think on our guilt. We have abused our

responsibility. All of us have incurred heavy guilt, and have reason to pray with the Psalmist: "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation." Think also on the evil inflicted on others. Some of us may have by our direct influence injured others in their souls, polluted their minds, and stained their conscience. Men may have been tempted by us to their eternal ruin. And if so, even although through the grace of Christ we ourselves are saved, it must embitter even the happiness of heaven to think that others are lost through our instrumentality.

As a great practical lesson we should be exceedingly circumspect in our conduct. We must be pure from the faults of others, not staining our conscience with being accessory to their sins. By our conduct we influence others for good or evil. Jesus Christ designs us to influence them only for good. We must be very scrupulous in our conduct, glorifying Christ by the holy consistency of our lives. We must be circumspect in our words; often one rash inadvertent word does a world of mischief. We must be prudent, so that religion may not suffer from our imprudence and rashness. We must keep ourselves pure, aiming at a high degree of purity in heart and life, and with the great Apostle endeavouring to preserve "a conscience void of offence toward God and toward all men."

VI

PERMANENCE OF OUR ACTIONS

ONE obvious way in which our actions are permanent is by their often becoming indelibly impressed upon us in the form of habits. By doing an action repeatedly, we acquire the habit of doing it almost unconsciously. And this is especially true of our moral nature. By repeated acts of covetousness, a man becomes habitually covetous; by doing false deeds and speaking false words, a man's nature becomes radically false; and so by deeds of kindness and love, a man becomes charitable and benevolent. These habits become part of our disposition; they are so engrained into our character as to become a second nature, a part and parcel of ourselves. Hence one man is notorious for covetousness; another is praised for liberality; and a third is infamous for falsehood. Evil habits however are not so permanent, but that by the grace of God they may be eradicated. But if not eradicated they will continue with us, we shall carry them into another world. Death does not effect any radical change upon our

character; it has no regenerating influence; it rather develops those habits and principles which already exist in the soul; it fixes them for eternity. Then the decree is pronounced, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

The actions which we do are permanent by being fixed in the memory. Who has not felt the power of memory to recall especially the bad actions which he has committed? Who has not at times experienced the resuscitating power of conscience? Years may have elapsed since the commission of some wicked action. The world may have long forgotten it, if ever it knew it, or took notice of it. But the man himself cannot forget it. It recurs to his memory again and again, like some demon continually haunting his path. No effort of his can cancel it from the too faithful tablets of his memory. Indeed nothing that has passed through our consciousness can ever be really forgotten; it may at any time be recalled. Hence then our memory has only to be strengthened, and every action we have done, and every word we have uttered, and every thought which has passed through our minds will be brought to our recollection; all are stored up to be again produced on the great day of human

reckoning; all will again pass before our mental vision; nothing is or can be obliterated; the excesses of our youthful days as well as the sins of our later life, the wrong deeds we have done as well as the sinful words we have uttered—all will come forth unbidden out of the chambers of our memory as witnesses against us.

Our actions are permanent in their effects or consequences. Every action which we do, whether good or bad, produces some effects however slight, and these effects become in their turn causes and produce other effects, and will work and interweave themselves with the history of the world for ever. We do not live isolated and apart; we act and react upon each other. We are inseparably united together, not as a stone, the particles of which are only cemented but are in reality independent, but as the body one member of which affects another. It may be impossible to trace the effects of our actions, but this arises from the weakness of our mental faculties; to beings of higher capacities these effects will be perfectly discernible. Our actions are immortal seeds which can never die; they shall produce a plentiful crop hereafter. We are either by our good actions preparing a harvest of holiness which shall be reaped thousands of years afterwards; or by our evil deeds we are sowing the seeds of pestilence and death which shall corrupt

men's moral nature long after we ourselves are gathered to our fathers.

Our actions are also permanent in the impressions which they make, and that even on the material world. There is always action and reaction, and this series continues for ever. The vessel which sails in the ocean displaces a portion of its waters, and this displacement draws after it particles of the surrounding element, and these again other particles, and so the motion is perpetuated. The force expended by a hammer on the solid block is not lost but is conveyed from particle to particle, decreasing in intensity, in proportion to the extent of the matter impressed. In short, extraordinary though it may seem, it is a truth demonstrated by the highest mathematics, that no motion, impressed by natural causes or by human agency, and no force exerted, is ever obliterated. There requires only an exalted intelligence; our mental faculties have only to be enlarged; our attention has only to be concentrated on one series of effects, and all the actions which we have done become discernible in the impressions which they have made. If a man steal, though there be no human eye to witness the theft, the very money which he touches will testify against him. If a man commit murder, although he may manage to evade human justice and to live and die without being suspected, yet

every portion of his victim's body shall bear impressed upon it the evidence of his crime.

Wicked actions cannot be undone; they constitute part of history; they are stereotyped in the pages of eternity. That act of dishonesty which has been perpetrated, although it has escaped the observation and detection of man, is indelibly engraven on the faithful records of the memory. That lie which has been uttered, never discovered or suspected by the world, is registered in the air we breathe. That act of seduction, by which another's will has been depraved and another's soul ruined, is, in its evil consequences, perpetual and cannot be remedied. Nothing can be revoked; no action done can be undone; no word uttered can be recalled; all are registered for eternity; like the mark set upon the brow of Cain, sin cannot be effaced.

On the commission or recollection of sin do not such thoughts as these frequently enter into your mind. I have done such an action. It was a wrong and wicked action. It has poisoned my soul. It has degraded my moral nature. It has exposed me to wrath. The world knew nothing about it, but my conscience knows it too well. I may succeed in concealing it from men, but I cannot conceal it from myself. And that action is mine—mine for ever. It cannot be undone; it is past, it is stereotyped against me in the records

of eternity. Would that I could forget the past! Would that my memory were an entire blank! Would that I could unlive my past life! The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit, a troubled conscience, who can bear?

And hence also in the conviction of the wicked at the day of judgment, God will have no need to call forth witnesses from a distance, to bring forward those who have seen the crimes committed. The witnesses are at hand, they are around the wicked and within them. God has only to resuscitate the memory, and the sinner is self-convicted; every sin which he has committed is recalled, and cannot possibly be denied. God has only to awaken the conscience, and the sinner sees and feels his guilt, and is made painfully sensible of the punishment which it deserves. God has only to enlarge the sinner's mental vision, and all the effects and consequences of his crimes pass in array before him. God has only to appeal to the material universe and every portion of it becomes vocal, denouncing the sinner, proclaiming his sins, and crying out for vengeance against him. "He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth, that He may judge His people." God appeals to the heavens above, and every impious word which the sinner has uttered —every falsehood and slander and blasphemy— all those words by which he has polluted his own

soul and the souls of others are found registered against him. God appeals to the earth beneath, and all the sinful actions which the sinner has done—all the deeds of oppression, of fraud, and of wrong, are proclaimed—all have left their indelible impressions upon the material universe.

This permanence of wicked actions will perhaps constitute a portion of the punishment of the condemned. Their wicked actions will always be present with them as their tormentors. They will see in them the cause of their eternal ruin and degradation. The sentence of their condemnation will in their sinful words and actions be continually sounding in their ears. Their conscience will be awakened and will pursue them with its eternal reproaches. Not that they will be grieved, because they have sinned against God; but like Cain they will lament that sin has brought upon them such grievous punishment.

But it will be objected that all this will go to prove that sinful actions, being permanent, cannot be forgiven or blotted out. But we must distinguish between the moral and the natural consequences of sin. Sin has its moral consequences in polluting the soul, and it has its natural consequences regulated by the laws of nature. When a man's sins are forgiven, he shall not come into condemnation; the moral consequences of sin in the ruin and degradation of his soul and in the

formation of evil habits shall be counteracted, even as a poison is counteracted by an antidote; he shall be by the merits of Christ and the grace of God accepted. But the natural consequences even of pardoned sin remain; the laws of nature are not reversed. The sinful actions are still permanent in the memory, in their effects upon others, and in the material universe. The consequences of past deeds remain; they remain as part of the history of the universe for ever. By no repentance can we undo our past actions. And thus it often happens that while sin is forgiven, the evil consequences of sin remain. David's dark crime in the matter of Uriah was forgiven him; but the evil consequences arising from it followed him even to the grave. We must not then confound the forgiveness of sin with its entire obliteration—the removal of all evil consequences arising from it—the expunging it from the page of history. The actions are done, and being done are eternal.

But it is a more pleasant task to meditate on the permanence of good actions. They also are under the same laws; they also are eternal. Good actions are seeds which shall spring up and flourish for ever as trees of righteousness in the paradise of God. Not one of them is forgotten by God; all shall be acknowledged and rewarded; even the cup of water given to a disciple in the name

of Christ shall not lose its reward. The good which is done is eternal in its effects, it has impressed itself upon the universe. The Sabbath school teacher who in all humility, with prayer and faith, instructs his scholars in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, may in the conversion of these scholars and in the holiness of their lives receive the fruits of his labours; and not only so, but these converted scholars may be the cause of the conversion of others still unborn, and so by the exertions of a humble teacher, holiness may be perpetuated from generation to generation. The district visitor, who in unselfish love, and for Christ's sake visits the poor and degraded in the lanes of our cities, and perhaps sees no evidence of good, yet labours not in vain; she cannot know how much the power of evil may have been arrested, and the light of truth may have penetrated into the surrounding moral darkness; eternity only will disclose this; but even although this should not have been the case, yet her self-denying exertions will have strengthened within herself the graces of love and sympathy and delivered her from the curse of selfishness. In short, every action which is done for Christ is eternal; it shall, like precious gold, be stored up in the treasury of the Lord.

And as the permanence of wicked actions shall constitute a part of the punishment of the wicked,

so the permanence of good actions shall constitute a part of the reward of the righteous. They shall experience the rejoicing of the apostle,—the testimony of a good conscience. Their memory shall recall the actions done for Christ, and the recollection of such deeds will be to them the source of the purest joy. And although their memory shall also recall their sinful actions, yet the fact that these are forgiven sins shall excite their eternal gratitude. The good which they have done will be seen in all its beneficial effects, and thus they will experience the pleasures of benevolence. And if they have been the honoured instruments in the conversion or religious improvement of others, they will in the eternal happiness of those converted experience the most exquisite delight. "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." Thus they shall be led to see that their existence has been a blessing to themselves and others; that they have not lived in vain in the world; and thus they will for ever adore that sovereign grace which was the cause of all their good works and the source of their immortal happiness.

VII

ON PAIN

PAIN is an object from which all shrink; some may be able to endure it better than others; some may have their nerves so finely strung as to be more acutely alive to pain; but all dread it and take precautions against it. Even those who endure it most bravely and are most sensible of the moral uses which it subserves, yet receive it as an unwelcome guest. There is a certain mystery about it; it belongs to the dark things of life. What purposes does it effect? What are its moral uses either to the sufferer or to the beholder? Here is a man suffering acute pain, writhing in agony, rendered thereby incapable of reflection or of fixing his attention on religious subjects, filling all the bystanders with unavailing grief, and this lasting for days, it may be for weeks and months.

Some find the solution of pain in the idea that it is but a less degree of happiness. Substance and shadow must ever be combined; and pain is only the shadow of happiness; so that unless

there be perfect, unadulterated happiness, there must be pain, in the same manner as dimness is only a less degree of light, and cold a less degree of heat. And as God never designed this world to be the abode of perfect happiness, so pain must ever exist; we must wait until we arrive in heaven to be in a condition where there is "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither any more pain." According to this view pain is a mere privation; it has no positive existence; some have more pain than others because they have less happiness than others, in the same manner as some have greater mental abilities than others. But nature itself teaches us that pain is not a mere privation, and those who suffer it can tell that it is something very real and positive, and no philosophical reflections will persuade them to the contrary.

Others suppose that pain is sent with the beneficial design of securing us against greater pain and more fatal damage. Thus a great multitude of nerves are placed on the surface of the body to prevent us running into danger; internal pain is felt to warn us to betake ourselves to remedies to prevent disease; other pains are warnings not again to offend against the laws of health; and others are forcible extrusions from the body of noxious substances. Pain is thus a sentinel set up to preserve the health of the body. Now un-

doubtedly there is a large amount of truth in this view of the subject; many of our bodily pains may be thus accounted for. But there are numerous other pains which admit of no such solution; there are all those excruciating pains which attack the vital parts; there are painful diseases which admit of no remedies; there are bodily agonies against which lesser pains give no warning; and there are deaths accompanied with pains which admit of little alleviation.

Another idea is that pain is inseparably connected with our body. Our bodies are so organised, so furnished with nerves, that pain is inevitable; it is inseparable from our very existence; and besides the organisation of our bodies ultimately leads to death, and there can be no death without some pain. Now such an answer might well account for pain, if the laws of nature were self-imposed; that is to say, if there were no Lawgiver, no Creator, no God. An atheist might thus solve the mystery of pain; but we who believe in a God cannot admit of the above solution. The question is, why should our bodies be so furnished with nerves that pain is inevitable? Why should we not be endowed with insensibility to pain? Why should death exist at all, or if some natural reasons can be assigned for it, why should it be accompanied with pain? Why should it not rather be a joy-

ful translation from a lower to a higher state of being?

Whatever be the reason of pain, we can however assert that it does not originate directly from God. We may not be able to explain the mystery, but this we maintain, that God originally created no human creature to be miserable. This is demonstrated by a consideration of the benevolent design of the contrivances of nature; our bodily organs and functions were not created in order to produce pain, but for beneficial purposes. Pain is an abnormal state of the organs and functions of the body; it is contrary to their original intention; so far from originating from God, it is contrary to His design in creation.

The reasons hitherto assigned have been inadequate, because they have overlooked the moral character of the sufferers. It is only when the moral element is taken into consideration that we can arrive at a reasonable explanation of this mystery.

We must regard pain as the penalty of sin; and if so, then we are entitled to enquire, "Wherefore does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" In human laws physical pain is often assigned as the punishment of crime—imprisonment with hard labour, the scourge, the infliction of death. Not that the judge has any pleasure in the sufferings of the criminal; but in

order that the majesty of the law may be vindicated. Now so is it with the moral government of God; there is an inseparable connection between sin and punishment. The moment a man sins, that moment he becomes liable to punishment. There is a punitive character in pain; it is the infliction of the law of God on sin. It does not matter that this infliction is brought about by the laws of nature; for what are the laws of nature but the ordinances of God? We see in many instances that such is the case and we may reasonably infer that the law is general, that all pain in some way or other is connected, either directly or indirectly, with sin. So that if we could conceive sin banished from the world, and a state of paradisaical innocence restored, it is probable that pain, so far as it concerns the human race, would vanish, disease and death would be unknown; in short, that it is sin which has so altered the benevolent design of God in our creation, that those organs and functions which were created for beneficent purposes become disordered and give rise to pain.

But if pain be the penalty of sin, how does it happen that it is so unequally distributed? It is not inflicted according to the moral deserts of the sufferers. Some who are comparatively holy, whose character is adorned with all Christian graces, who are in our view almost perfect, are

subject to great sufferings; whereas some miscreants pass through life without much physical pain. There is surely here no evidence of the punitive nature of pain. But the answer to this is obvious; this present life is not a state of retribution but of trial, and therefore in entire consistency with divine justice, pleasure and pain are unequally distributed; the time will come when these present irregularities will be adjusted. If a man does not suffer more than his sins deserve, he has no right to complain, and we are incapable of balancing our sufferings with our deserts; but certain it is, that those holy saints, who are the greatest sufferers, freely admit that God so far from being rigorous to punish has dealt very mercifully with them, and they are enabled to give thanks to Him in inflicting less punishment than their sins deserved.

Again, pain displays the moral government of God, and imparts to us correct views of His perfections. Just as in human affairs pains and penalties are a sensible evidence that we are under the government of the country to which we belong —that there are laws which must be obeyed and disobedience to which is punished; so pains are a sensible reminder that we are under the moral government of God. We are thus made to see how erroneous are those views of God which many entertain. Some appear to regard God as a God

of infinite indulgence who, indifferent to the moral character of His creatures, seeks only their happiness; who will not be severe to mark iniquity nor rigorous to punish. But pain is a correction to this view: here we see the severity of God; here we are taught that God is a God of infinite justice as well as of infinite goodness, and that He will not suffer His laws to be broken with impunity. He desires the happiness of His creatures, but He will not secure that happiness at the expense of His justice. His law must be vindicated and the guilty punished.

There is another consideration, namely that the design of pain is to improve and exercise our Christian virtues. The afflictions which, if believers, we endure in this world, are more of the nature of corrections designed for our moral improvement than punishments for our sins. This may be clearly discerned in ordinary sufferings; though it is not so evident in severe pain which renders a man incapable of reflection. Pain is a stern schoolmaster which teaches us several important lessons, and by severe discipline educates our moral character; we learn obedience by the things which we suffer.

Pain educates us in Christian fortitude and patience. Fortitude and patience are twin graces; the one active in undergoing sufferings, the other passive in enduring them, and both are improved

and exercised by pain. Christian fortitude is faith in suffering; a firm belief in the fatherly love of God, notwithstanding many apparent proofs to the contrary; it takes the bitter cup into its hand saying, "The cup which my Father giveth me to drink shall I not drink it." Christian patience is hope in suffering; it looks forward to a happy termination to all these troubles, and therefore it endures having a respect to the recompense of the reward. We must learn to suffer and be strong. This is indeed a hard lesson, and may only be learned after repeated trials; the more prolonged the pain the more will Christian fortitude display itself—a fortitude which while it may shrink from the approach of suffering, yet bravely bears the trial. So also patience in pain has often its perfect work; the man lies passive in the hands of God; resignation and submission to God are beautifully displayed; and even in the midst of severe pain no murmuring is heard, no complaining word escapes the lips.

Pain endears heaven to the Christian as a place of rest. His hold of this world is loosened; the chains which bind him to it are broken; and he is rendered the more willing to depart. The pleasures of the world no longer delight him, and its honours no longer captivate him. Severe attacks of pain cause him to long to be at rest in heaven; death ceases to be an object of dread,

rather is it an object of desire, for then he shall have no more pain ; his spirit shall be delivered from the prison of the body, and he shall rest for ever in the arms of his Saviour.

The contemplation of Christ's sufferings supplies us with an example of patience and affords us an argument for its practice. It was the observation of Robert Hall—a man who nearly all his lifetime was a constant martyr to pain—when on his death-bed and falling from one severe paroxysm of pain into another, " that a contemplation of the sufferings of Christ was the best antidote against impatience under any trial that we might experience." Thousands of suffering ones have felt the benefit of this advice. We have far more reason to be patient that ever Christ had. Our sufferings are less in point of intensity than His ; they are involuntary and cannot be avoided, whilst His were voluntary and might have been declined ; they are the penalty of our sins, whilst His arose from the imputation of our transgressions. And yet how patiently did He endure all His unparalleled sufferings. Not a murmur escaped His lips, and He drained to the dregs the bitter cup which the Father had put into His hand.

VIII

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

In this paper we wish to enquire into the nature of the sufferings of Christ, and so far as their mystery can be understood by us to examine the elements of which they were composed. His sorrow and humiliation commenced at His entrance into this world. His birth-place was a stable and His cradle a manger. No sooner was He born than His life was sought, and Mary and her husband had to fly with Him into Egypt. He spent His youth in poverty, and for thirty years of His life laboured at the occupation of a carpenter. And when He emerged from His obscurity, and commenced His public ministry, and appeared in Judæa as the accredited messenger of Jehovah, His sufferings were increased, and to His poverty were added the oppositions and persecutions of His enemies. His very miracles of love were converted into a charge against Him, and He was accused of being in league with Beelzebub the prince of the devils. His earnest endeavours for the reformation of the

wicked were regarded as partnership in their guilt, and He was charged with being the associate of sinners. If He healed a blind man on the Sabbath day, He was looked upon as a Sabbath breaker; if He spoke of His Father, He was regarded as a blasphemer.

But these particulars constituted a very small portion of our Saviour's sorrows. These were merely outward afflictions, and we can conceive a man possessed with a consciousness of his own integrity enduring all these things not only without much sorrow, but even with some degree of satisfaction. But the sorrow of our Saviour was not merely occasioned by these outward calamities, it had its seat in the soul, and it was the very holiness and purity of His character that was one great cause of His sorrow. Let us picture to ourselves a perfectly holy being coming into this world, mixing freely in human society, traversing our streets and lanes and byways, hearing all the blasphemous words which are spoken, and seeing all the blasphemous actions which are done, what would be the great cause of his sorrow? Would it not be that awful spectacle of wickedness which He saw—these fearful enormities which are committed. Now such a being was Jesus Christ; He was perfectly holy, and yet He came into daily contact with human wickedness; and far more than this, He saw into the human

heart, He penetrated into the motives of human action, He discerned not merely the open sins of the publicans, but the hypocrisy of the Pharisee. If David could say "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved because they kept not thy word," how intense must have been the grief of Jesus at the sight of human wickedness! We are apt to overlook this element of our Saviour's sufferings because we look on sin with little emotion; but the more holy any individual is, the more intense will be the sorrow with which he regards human wickedness, and therefore our Saviour who was infinitely holy must have been filled with an unmeasurable grief for sin. The more we think of this, the more we will see that this feeling of grief at the sight of sin must have constituted one of the chief elements of our Saviour's sorrow; and that it was not so much His outward condition of life as His internal feelings that constituted Him the "man of sorrows."

Another element of our Saviour's sufferings must have been the obstinacy and perverseness of His hearers. This is an element of His sorrow which is often adverted to by the evangelists. We read of Jesus complaining of the perverseness of His hearers, saying, "Why do ye not believe?" and after one strong exhibition of their unbelief, we are informed that He looked round about Him with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their

hearts. Jesus Christ came into this world as the great prophet of God, proclaiming pardon and peace to all who would repent of their sins and believe on Him, preaching the kingdom of heaven, and offering salvation to all who came to Him; and yet by most His message was rejected and disbelieved; He was regarded as an impostor, and men persevered in their wickedness. How peculiarly afflicting must it have been to His generous and loving mind to see His offers of mercy despised, knowing, as He did, that the message which He delivered was of eternal importance and of eternal truth, and yet finding this message disregarded. Even those few who embraced His cause were filled with such inveterate prejudice that, during the whole course of His life, He could hardly teach them the first principles of His Gospel; whilst He spake to them of suffering and agony, they were continually dreaming of earthly greatness and power; whilst He pointed to the cross, their hearts were occupied with the anticipation of His restoring the kingdom to Israel.

A third element in the sufferings of Jesus was His being perfectly destitute of the sympathy of others. Jesus endured His sorrow alone. His friends could not enter into His feelings; they did not understand Him; when He alluded to His future sufferings, they wondered what He meant;

and when in the garden of Gethsemane He appealed to their sympathy, He encountered only the coldness of indifference; the disciples were asleep; He must tread the wine-press alone; no human hand was to alleviate the burden of His sorrow; no human sympathy was to sweeten the cup of His bitterness. The man of sorrows was necessarily alone in the world.

But whilst none sympathised with Him in His sorrows, He was fully alive to the sufferings of others; He deeply sympathised with them. Those tears which He is recorded to have shed were tears not for His own but for others' sorrows; they were tears of sympathy. He felt keenly for human woe; He was touched with a fellow-feeling for our infirmities. Seeing the wickedness of His own nation, and knowing the awful calamities in which that wickedness must ultimately terminate; beholding in the clear light of prophecy all those awful sufferings which were to befall the Jews, His tender soul was melted, and when He pronounced the doom of that wicked city, it was with weeping eyes and a breaking heart. And if we carry our thoughts forward to another world, if we think on the sufferings of lost souls, if we recollect that Jesus knew full well what these sufferings are, and if we then reflect on His sympathy, we cannot fail to perceive that grief for those who will ultimately perish must have constituted a large

portion of the grief of Jesus. It is our unbelief which causes us to look with indifference on the miserable condition of the impenitent; but Jesus felt for them, Jesus wept for them, because He knew what the loss of the soul really is, and seeing such souls all around Him perishing, and His efforts to save them unavailing, His whole life in this world must have been one of sympathetic sorrow.

His days commenced in sorrow, and as He advanced in years these sorrows increased and thickened around Him, until at length His life closed in the gloom and darkness of woe. He was betrayed into the hands of His enemies by one of His followers. All His friends and disciples forsook Him and fled. One only followed Him at a distance, and he followed, only to deny Him. He was led from one tribunal to another. At the palace of Caiaphas, at the house of Herod, and in the judgment hall of Pilate, He met with insult and cruel treatment. At length He was led away to be crucified. He was nailed to the cross. He suffered the agonies of the cruellest of all deaths.

The same observation may be made on the sufferings of Christ at His death, as was made on His sufferings during His life; that His outward bodily sufferings constituted only a portion of His sorrow. We do not lessen the agonies of our Saviour's painful death; crucifixion is perhaps the

most painful of all deaths; and in the case of Christ it was aggravated by every circumstance of ignominy and shame. But there were other men, and many of these Christ's own disciples, who have suffered the cruellest sufferings and endured them without shrinking. We read of weak and helpless women being nailed to the stake, and yet rejoicing in the flames; of many put to the most excruciating tortures, and yet not suffering one murmur to escape their lips. Mere bodily pain, let it be carried to the greatest extent, can yet be borne by a determined will without shrinking. But Jesus shrank from His sufferings, and as the time drew nigh He prayed that the cup might pass from Him. Now why was this? Was Jesus less brave than His followers? Did that fortitude which sustained His disciples in the hour of martyrdom fail Him? We may be certain that whatever was the cause, this at least was not the reason. The fortitude of Jesus was greater than that of any other man. And in proof of this we have only to observe that it was not His bodily sufferings that drew forth His strong crying and tears, it was the sufferings of His soul.

It is only when we view the sufferings of Christ as connected with the atonement which He made for sin that we can understand them. Take away from them this element, and they become incomprehensible. But when we consider them in this

light we see a sufficient reason for their intensity; "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." His sufferings then were the effects of our sins. He Himself was without sin—"holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." What He suffered then was not the punishment of His but of our transgressions. This it was that constituted the essence of His sufferings; that was not only the cause of all His sufferings, but the bitterness of them. We do not indeed comprehend the manner in which Christ bore our sins or how they affected Him, this is a mystery into which even angels desire to look, but we may very easily believe that it was this element that added poignancy to all His sufferings, and was the cause of His strong crying and tears.

In order to perceive the truth of this remark, we have only to attend to the times and occasions when Jesus appeared to endure most suffering, and we will perceive that mere bodily pain constituted a very small element in these sufferings. In the garden of Gethsemane, no hand of man was upon Him, His bodily sufferings had not commenced, He was still at liberty; but then and there He endured the most awful agony—His sweat was as great drops of blood falling to the ground, His soul was exceeding sorrowful even

unto death, so overwhelmed was He with sorrow that an angel had to be sent from heaven to sustain Him. Then it was that He offered up strong crying and tears. Then it was that He prayed that the cup might pass from Him. This was not bodily agony, it was the agony of the soul. Again when hanging on the cross, suffering all His bodily tortures with calmness and without a murmur, even forgetting these sufferings in order to speak the words of sympathy to others, on a sudden He cries out, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" It was spiritual desertion of which He complained; it was His being forsaken by God, the withdrawment of the divine consolation that made Him so cry out. This also was not bodily agony; it was the agony of the soul; it was the cry of a wounded spirit. An awful sense of sin must have weighed upon the mind of Jesus; He then bore the sins of the world, He then poured out His soul unto death and made it an offering for sin.

There is yet another element which increased the sufferings of Christ and that was His perfect knowledge and full foresight of them. He foresaw everything that should befall Him; He predicted the treachery of Judas, the denial of Peter and the circumstances of His own death. Now even with regard to bodily sufferings the foresight of them necessarily increases their amount; it is so much

the more prolonged suffering. But when we think of the sufferings of Christ, His soul sufferings, their intensity, their awful, mysterious nature, and that all these sufferings were fully foreseen by Him, foreseen in all their magnitude and terribleness, it is easy to understand how this must have augmented their nature. He had entered upon a life which He clearly saw must terminate in an awful death of agony; this end was ever present with Him and He was inevitably approaching to it; this death in all its horrors lay fully in view in His path; and hence it was that He was frequently troubled in spirit. Although our evils and sufferings and sorrows are light and insignificant compared with those of Christ, yet supposing that we foresaw every one of them, all, as it were, in one heap, all spread out before our eyes—the disappointments of our lot, the bereavements, the desertions, the pains, the sicknesses, the hardships, and at length death—the bravest man would tremble before the vision, and if such a vision were continually before him, his life would be one of protracted misery. And yet this vision of future suffering was perpetually before the mind of Jesus, and are we then to wonder that He should be a man of sorrows?

IX

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

By the incarnation we mean that God took upon Himself human nature and manifested Himself in the person of Jesus Christ; that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, "God manifest in the flesh," and that He united in His own incomprehensible Person the natures of God and man. And certainly the simple statement of this doctrine must impress us with a sense of its extreme mysteriousness. That the God of heaven and of earth, the Lord of unnumbered universes, should so humble Himself as to assume human nature; that Jesus of Nazareth, who as man traversed our world, who was a prey to human weakness, and who at length expired upon the cross of Calvary, was God incarnate, is a statement which confounds human reason, a mystery which baffles our faculties to comprehend. It surpasses all our conceptions and fills our minds with amazement and awe. And Scripture, far from softening this stupendous mystery, or affording any explanation, positively asserts it.

"Great without controversy is the mystery of Godliness; God was manifest in the flesh."

This mystery, stupendous though it is, whose nature is inconceivable, and the mere statement of which confounds human reason, is the object of faith. Our belief in it is founded on revelation; for when once we are convinced that Christianity is a revelation of God and that such a doctrine is contained in that revelation, our duty is not to dispute, or doubt, or cavil, but simply to believe. We must submit our understanding to the teachings of infinite Wisdom. We must distinguish between what is contrary to reason and what is above reason. No authority whatever could cause us to believe what is contrary to reason; whereas information from a superior intelligence, especially if that intelligence be divine, will convince us of the truth of what is above reason. Now the doctrine of the incarnation, though far above human reason, entirely out of its sphere, a doctrine which baffles our understanding to explain or even to conceive, cannot be proved to be contrary to human reason. It is, indeed, an amazing mystery which angels desire to look into; but yet it is a mystery which may be made known, and which God has been pleased to reveal.

Nor is this doctrine a matter of minor importance, as some would have us to imagine; it lies at the foundation of Christianity. Our conceptions

of the Christian system are entirely altered, according as we do or do not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ. If we deny the divinity of Christ, we deny Christianity, we renounce it as a revelation from God and rank it among those religious systems which have emanated from man. If Christ be not God manifest in the flesh, it must inevitably follow that the majority of Christians who maintain this doctrine, and to whom Christ is the object of worship, are idolaters; so that all that Christ has done for the human race is to draw away men's attention and affections from God, and to fix them upon Himself; and all that Christianity has effected is to convert men from one species of idolatry to another, still more permanent and extensive.

When we seriously think on our conceptions of the Godhead and on our religious feelings, we will be constrained to acknowledge that the only religion adapted to man, at least in his fallen state, is the worship of a divine humanity. We cannot ascend to God; we cannot grasp the Infinite; God therefore must descend to us; He must clothe Himself with human properties; He must reveal Himself as a divine humanity to be the object of our worship.

The doctrine of Christ's divinity undoubtedly forms a part of the gospel system; and all attempts to deny this lead to the most arbitrary assump-

tions and the most violent interpretations of Scripture. There are on this point most express and plain assertions, especially in the writings of St Paul and St John. Thus St Paul says, "Christ being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "Great without controversy is the mystery of Godliness: God manifest in the flesh." And the declaration of St John: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." But not only are there these express statements, but this doctrine is involved in the whole gospel system; everywhere it is presupposed and taken for granted. Christianity is the religion of Christ; Christ is the great central object; He is everywhere exalted, held forth as the object of supreme trust and unbounded affection; all men are drawn toward Him; all men must bow the knee to Him; all men are commanded to honour the Son even as they honour the Father; He is the Alpha and Omega of revelation.

There are three considerations which may enable us to acquiesce in these declarations of Scripture, and to overcome those doubts to which the awful mysteriousness of this doctrine may give rise—the character of Christ, the doctrine of St Paul, and the experience of the saints.

The character of Christ is a strong corroboration of those statements made in Scripture concerning His divinity. When we read over the simple narrative of the life of Christ, as given us by the four evangelists, what strikes us is the extreme purity and moral beauty of His character. There is a uniqueness in the description which not only has never been approached, but which has never been attempted in any biography. He walks about this earth a pure, sinless being, liable to human infirmities, but unstained by human frailties, as if He were some heavenly denizen tarrying on earth. And, as Dr Bushnell observes, what removes His holiness from that of all other men, and renders it not human but divine, is that in it there is no acknowledgment of sin. Even the holiest and brightest characters frankly acknowledge, not only that they have sinned, but that they continue to sin; St Paul confesses that when he would do good, evil is too often present with him. But nothing of this kind occurs in Christ; He makes no confession of wrong; He acknowledges no fault, no mistake; He offers up no prayer to God for forgiveness. And yet we feel that there is no assumption of righteousness with Him; that all this arises from the entire sinlessness of His character.

Now connect with this purity of Jesus His self-consciousness of divinity. Conceive a human

being using such expressions as the following: "Before Abraham was I am;" "I came forth from the Father;" "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me;" "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest;" "All men shall honour the Son even as they honour the Father." Speaking of God as if He were His equal, "I and My Father are one." And His very prayers to God are so expressed that we would regard them as irreverence in any other lips, "Father, I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am." Now what explanation can be given of all this, except that Jesus possessed the consciousness of His own divinity. Such declarations in any other would be considered not only as the climax of insufferable arrogance, and the height of extravagance, but as the ravings of insanity.

And yet we feel that these astonishing pretensions of Christ, this claim to equality with God, this self-consciousness of divinity, are fully supported. Here there are no ravings, no extravagance, no pride; these are not the words of him who hath a devil. On the contrary pride and vain boasting would perhaps be the last faults which one would attach to the conduct of Jesus. He is pre-eminent for His meekness, His gentleness, His forbearance, His condescension;

humility is one of the distinguishing features of His character.

The second consideration is that the doctrine of the incarnation was the doctrine of St Paul. St Paul is the great theologian of Christianity. He excelled all the other writers of the New Testament not only in the number of his writings, but in the clearness of his doctrinal statements. There is, so to speak, a greater development of Christianity in his writings than in any other portion of the New Testament. Now St Paul undoubtedly taught the divinity of Christ, however we may regard his opinion. This doctrine enters into his whole theology. We cannot read a single epistle without seeing how reverently he bows the knee to Jesus. He owns Him as his Lord, dedicates himself to His service, declares his readiness to die for Him, addresses to Him his earnest prayers, speaks of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, conjoins Him with God the Father in his acts of worship, in all his epistles invokes His grace to rest upon his converts, looks upon future happiness as consisting in being with Him, asserts that He is the Creator of the universe, announces that He shall come again as the Judge of the world, and pronounces a terrible curse upon those who refuse to bestow upon Him their supreme affection. St Paul was not merely an ardent admirer but a devout worshipper of Christ ;

he taught and acted upon the conviction that in Christ Jesus dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

Now the question is Whence did St Paul acquire this doctrine? What suggested to him the marvellous idea that the author of the Christian religion, the crucified Galilean, was no mere man, but God manifest in the flesh? He did not derive this idea from Judaism. It was from Judaism that he derived his bitter hatred to Christianity; and even after his admission that Jesus was the Messiah of the Jews, there was nothing in the opinions of the Jews at that period that would lead us to infer that they regarded their Messiah as God manifest in the flesh, rather they viewed Him as a mighty conqueror or superior legislator, a second David or second Moses, but yet human. Nor did he derive it from the Christians. He positively affirms that he did not derive his views from the early apostles, or from intercourse with them; and indeed we find that immediately after his conversion, and before he had the opportunity of being instructed in the mysteries of the faith, he preached this very doctrine in the synagogues of Damascus. The only human account that can be given of the origin of these views of St Paul is to affirm that he was a fanatic, and that like many other converts he passed from one extreme to the other, from the extreme of Judaism to the extreme

of Christianity, from regarding Christ as an impostor to regard Him as the Son of God. But whatever St Paul was he was no fanatic. His zeal and earnestness were under subordination to an acute judgment, and he possessed a perfect mastery over himself; his conduct, his speeches, his discipline over his converts, his answers to their inquiries, the whole tenor of his masterly epistles, render the supposition of fanaticism in St Paul a baseless delusion.

Whence then had St Paul these views? The only satisfactory answer to the question is what he himself gives, that he received them from divine revelation. "I certify to you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after men. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ." And if this be so, if this be the true solution, then we have a proof that the divinity of Christ constitutes a part of the revelation of God.

The third consideration is the experience of the saints. The argument derived from experience is self-evident to the man who is the subject of the experience. But the same argument is convincing also to others, even to those who have not that experience. If we see that faith in Christ does actually save sinners, that it converts them into saints, that it raises them above worldly considerations and motives, that it invests them

with undeniable graces which undoubtedly spring from their religion, then we are constrained to acknowledge that there is an undoubted efficacy in the Gospel of Christ.

The question then is, Has the Gospel produced such effects? Is there a reality in saintliness? Or are those who profess to be influenced by the Gospel after all no better than their neighbours, as worldly, as selfish, as dishonest as others? Is vital religion a delusion? Some of us may be able from our own observation to answer this question. We may be privileged to enjoy the society of those of whose saintliness we can have no doubt; their devotional feelings, their unselfishness, their cheerfulness in suffering, their unbounded love, their almost perfect characters yet combined with meekness, and all this arising from faith in Christ, are undoubted evidences of the reality of Christianity. But even if we be not so privileged, we may have read in the biographies of the saints in past ages, of devoted missionaries or holy martyrs, all of whom were influenced not by the Spirit which is of this world, but by the Spirit which is of God. Make what allowances you please for overstatement and exaggeration, yet the reality of saintliness in many instances cannot be denied.

Now all these saints, almost without exception, whether living or departed, were not only believers

in the divinity of Christ, but this was the great doctrine of their faith, that on which they rested and from which they professed to derive their strength and their saintliness. Christ was to them "all in all," the Master who commanded their services, the object of their worship and supreme affection, the ground of their hopes, the source of all their spiritual strength, their Saviour God. They were worshippers of Christ. Now if this doctrine were false, how can we account for the vast majority of holy men and women in every age, not only believing in this doctrine, but actually deriving their holiness from it. Saintship is not of the earth earthly; it is the work of the Spirit of God; it is the attestation of the Spirit to the divinity of the Son, in conformity to our Lord's own blessed words, "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you."

X

CHRIST'S REFUSAL TO SAVE HIMSELF

THE taunt of the enemies of Jesus when He hung upon the cross was "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." "He saved others." This was the very purpose for which He came into the world. "The Son of Man is come to save that which is lost." This is the very meaning of His name: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." When on earth He saved others. When He touched the eyes of the blind, they opened themselves to the light of day. The ears of the deaf were unstopped; and the lame man leaped as the hart. The paralytic were restored to strength, and the possessed recovered their reason. He stood at the grave of Lazarus, and the dead came forth at His command. But these temporal deliverances were nothing compared with those spiritual deliverances which He now works out for us in heaven. As the Saviour of men, He still pursues His mighty plan. Those who are spiritually blind are

enlightened, and those who are dead in sin are quickened to newness of life. Those who are morally degraded are restored to holiness, and those who are polluted with guilt are cleansed. Many have felt His saving power. Many sinners, filled with fear and trembling, heavy burdened with a load of guilt, exposed to the wrath of God, troubled in their conscience, enslaved by their passions, alarmed with the thoughts of hell, have come to the Saviour, and have experienced the truth of the assertion, "He saved others." Thousands now in glory and thousands still struggling on earth are the monuments of His saving power.

But although Jesus saved others He did not save Himself. He was dragged before Caiaphas and Herod and Pilate; He was mocked and scourged and crowned with thorns; He was nailed to the accursed tree; at length He expired on a cross of agony. His enemies challenged Him to come down from the cross as a test of the truth of His claims, but the challenge remained unanswered. Now what was the cause of this? Why did He who called the dead from their graves, not cause the nails to start from His hands and feet? Why did He who calmed the raging of the billows not still the raging of the people? Why did He, at whose command were legions of angels, not come down from the cross

to the confusion of His enemies? Evidently it was from no want of power. It would have been easy for Him to have converted Calvary into a mount of transfiguration; to have transformed the cross into a throne, and the crown of thorns into a crown of glory. It must have been of His own free will and choice that He remained on the cross. The act was perfectly voluntary on His part. No power could fix Him there, were it not of His own free consent. He could have saved Himself, but He would not.

There were things which Jesus Christ could not do. As St Paul says of God that "it was impossible for Him to lie," so we may well say of Christ that it was impossible for Him to do wrong. Jesus Christ could do many things which we cannot do. He could give sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf, cure the sick, cleanse the lepers, walk on the sea, quiet the storm, and raise the dead. But to our disgrace the converse is also true; there are many things which we can easily do but which were impossibilities with Christ. Christ could not do an unjust action, utter a false word, judge uncharitably of others, act an inconsistent part, or cherish a covetous disposition. To speak evil of our neighbour, to tarnish his fair character, to slander his good name, this is easy for us, but was an impossibility with Christ. To utter a falsehood, or to do a

dishonest action, is with multitudes an every-day occurrence, but was beyond the power of Christ. To live worldly lives, to seek to amass riches, to worship the mammon of unrighteousness, all these we can easily do, but it would be blasphemy to suppose that they were within the sphere of Christ's possibilities. He could change the laws of nature, walk on the sea, calm its billows, multiply the loaves, and convert water into wine, but to violate the least of God's moral laws, to make that which is right wrong, or that which is wrong right, in a word, to yield to the devil's temptations and to commit sin, all this was impossible for Him to do.

But not only so; the impossibility is not merely negative, but also positive; it was not only impossible for Christ to do wrong, but it was also impossible for Him not to do good. He could not look upon the distressed without helping them; He could not view a world lying in sin and wretchedness and crime, without attempting to save it; He could not behold impenitent Jerusalem without tears of compassion. It was impossible for Him not to help the wretched. Here again there is a vast difference between us and Christ. To be uncharitable and hard-hearted and unkind; to shut our ears against the complaints of the miserable and to avoid the sight of the wretched, nothing is so easy for us to do; but

all this was an impossibility to Christ. To pursue our own selfish designs, to overlook the claims of others on our lives and services, to live unprofitable lives, this with many is their daily employment, but such a life was beyond the power of Christ. In a word, to save ourselves this we can, but Christ could not do.

Christ could not save Himself because He saved others. Self-sacrifice is required to save others. This is a law of our moral being. If we wish to save others, we must put self out of the question, we must submit to trouble, we must practise self-denial, we must imitate the self-sacrifice of Christ. In order to assist the wretched, we must enter into their sorrows, we must sympathise with them, we must put ourselves in their place. In order to elevate the degraded, we must visit them in their hovels. And in order to raise the sinful and fallen, we must largely have imbibed that charity which seeketh not its own. In short, it is a law of God that we can only save others by the sacrifice of self. A man who wishes to save another from drowning must plunge into the sea and run the risk of being himself drowned. The captain of a sinking vessel, if he performs his duty, stands at his post, contrives and carries out means for the safety of the passengers, sees them put into the life-boat, is himself the last man to quit, and it may be perishes in the act of saving others.

Now such was the conduct of Jesus Christ. These acts of self-sacrifice are but the shadows of His cross. His death was the great act of self-sacrifice. Think of its perfect voluntariness. When there was no eye to pity and no arm powerful enough to bring deliverance, His own eye pitied and His right arm wrought salvation. Think on the greatness of this self-sacrifice. The Son of God took upon Himself our nature, bore our sins and carried our sorrows, and poured forth His precious blood. He saw men perishing, the billows of God's wrath ready to overwhelm them, and He plunged into that sea of wrath in order to rescue them. He saw the arm of justice uplifted to smite and sinners ready to perish, and He interposed, He submitted to the stroke. In rescuing others He had to pass through Gethsemane and Calvary, and to endure the malice of men, the wrath of hell, and the hidings of His Father's countenance. He saved others, but it was by the sacrifice of Himself.

Herein consists the true moral dignity and power of Christ. His enemies taunted Him with His want of power; they considered His remaining on the cross an evidence of weakness. But most certainly He proved Himself to be the true King of Israel by remaining on the cross. No weakness this, but the fulness of kingly power. To have descended from the cross unhurt would certainly have been a miracle of power and would

have struck His enemies with fear, but to remain on that cross when He had the power to come down, to listen to the challenge of His enemies without a reply, to suffer the cruellest agonies without a murmur when He might have escaped them all, and to do all this in order to save others, was a far more glorious miracle of grace and filled heaven with admiration. Greater far that wonderful triumph of His self-sacrificing love and most heroic patience than would have been the triumph of His power by His descent from the cross. Nobler far the crown of thorns than the crown of gold.

The great work of the atonement required that He should not save Himself. There is much mystery connected with the atonement; we do not know the full evil of sin or its connection with other parts of God's universe. The death of Christ was far more than an act of self-sacrifice; it was a satisfaction rendered to divine justice for our sins; God has declared that without the shedding of blood there is no remission. In order that sin might be pardoned the Son of God had to take upon Himself our nature, and offer Himself as a sacrifice on the cross. Only thus could God's honour and glory be maintained; only when satisfaction was made to justice, could mercy be extended to the guilty. And our Lord became the sinner's substitute of His own free will and choice; He undertook the work of our redemp-

tion, and He knew well that in the accomplishment of that work He must suffer; and hence neither the execrations of the wicked, nor the legions of hell, nor all the agonies of the cross could cause Him to desist. He could not save Himself, otherwise the great work of atonement which the Father had given Him to do and which He had undertaken would have remained undone. There is in the present day an overlooking of this doctrine of the atonement, placing it in the background, shrinking from the declaration of the full truth. And yet this is the great fact of revelation, the fundamental doctrine of Christianity. It is most right and proper to admire the character of Christ, to meditate on His heavenly virtues, and we cannot do so too much; but we must never forget that it is not His example, but His death which is of primary importance. He died not as a martyr for the truth, but as a propitiation for iniquity. The cross is the cause of our salvation. We can only receive the crown through the agonies of the cross; we can only approach the mercy seat, because it has been sprinkled with His precious blood; we can only be made partakers of the glory of Christ by having obtained an interest in His sufferings. We must expect forgiveness, and holiness, and peace, and eternal life through Him who did not save Himself in order that we and others might be saved.

We see here the almighty power of love. It was love which was the cause of our redemption. This was the motive which impelled the Saviour to come on His errand of mercy and grace into our world. He saw sinners perishing, and love constrained Him for their sakes to brave the powers of hell and the principalities of earth, the hidings of His Father's face and the agonies of the cross. He loved us with a love stronger than death, which the bitterest and most unmerited persecution could not restrain, and which death in its cruellest forms could not suppress. It was not the nails which bound Him to the cross, it was love to the souls of men. It was from no want of power that He did not come down from the cross, but it was the power of love which fixed Him there. This was the cause of the impossibility of Christ; love impelled Him to save others; but love also prevented Him from saving Himself. And He who died for us on earth is working for us in heaven. He pleads our cause at the Father's right hand; He sends forth His Holy Spirit to redeem us from sin; He pours forth upon us the plenitude of His gifts and graces. The love of Christ is even as the sun in the spiritual world; for as in the natural world the sun is the source of light and heat and life, so the love of Christ dissolves the darkness of the moral world, warms and gladdens the souls of men,

and quickens them to spiritual and eternal life. The love of Christ is the Shekinah of heaven, the glory of the upper sanctuary, the beauty of God. The love of Christ has redeemed the world from perdition and filled heaven with its inhabitants. The love of Christ is the theme of the hallelujahs of angels, and of the eternal gratitude of the saints in glory. The love of Christ is Christ Himself, for it is the very heart of Christ, the harmony of His infinite perfections, the essence of His character. May we be enabled to comprehend with all saints, and to know the height and depth and length and breadth of this love of Christ which passeth knowledge; for then we shall be filled with all the fulness of God.

XI

THE JOY OF JESUS

WE are accustomed to call Jesus and that rightly "the Man of Sorrows." As such He was foretold by Isaiah: "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." And the history of His life is just a corroboration of this prediction of the prophet. We read only of one uninterrupted course of suffering; poverty, contempt, disappointment, persecution, mockery, scourging, crucifixion. And when we think on His being and character, we see more sources of sorrow than the mere outward calamities which befel Him. The constant contact of His pure nature with wickedness, the entire want of human sympathy with His feelings, the mysterious endurance of divine wrath, His soul an offering for sin, were all the occasions of sorrow. Hence it is that joy would be one of the last feelings which many would ascribe to Jesus. And yet, in His last conversation with His disciples, Jesus speaks of His joy; and this He does not at a time when the dark clouds had rolled back, but when these

clouds had gathered thickest around Him, when the storm was at its height, in the hour and power of darkness. "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." Thus proving how mistaken we are if we conceive that Jesus was a stranger to the feeling of joy.

And as such a mistake is made regarding Jesus, so a similar mistake is made regarding His religion. It is a common notion that Christianity is devoid of joy. Men look upon it as a restraint, a burden, a melancholic spirit, the extinguisher of joy. And perhaps it may be, that when they look at some of their acquaintances who profess to be more under the influence of religion than others, they do not see any reason for changing their opinion. And there is a certain appearance of truth in this view. Christianity is a life of penitence, restraint, mortification, spiritual dissatisfaction, self-denial, and sacrifice. And yet, paradoxical though it may seem, it is a religion of joy. Joy is the element in which the believer moves, even a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Here, then, both in the case of Christ and of His disciples we have an apparent contradiction: sorrow and peace, sacrifice and joy. Let us try if we can find the solution of this enigma; let us meditate on the joy of Jesus as being the pattern of the joy of His disciples.

I. The joy of Jesus arose from the perfect holiness of His character.

Holiness in its nature is joy, and perfect holiness is perfect joy. In the perfect holiness of His nature, Jesus must have possessed an unfailing source of joy. Outwardly, He was exposed to suffering; according to the views of the world His condition was unhappy; His life commenced in a manger and ended on a cross. But inwardly, in His mind, in His perfect freedom from moral discord, in His possession of the most blissful virtues, in the divine harmony of His nature, He possessed peace and abiding joy. Let the clouds be ever so dark and threatening, let the tempest be ever so loud, yet He was living an exalted life far above the clouds, where the sun shone with undiminished rays.

A difference has been well drawn by Dr Bushnell between two kinds of happiness, or between happiness and joy. Happiness comes from without; it is external and foreign to the soul; it arises from things which are outside the man, such as all the blessings which wealth bestows, all the external comforts of life, all the advantages of position, influence, rank. Joy again proceeds from within; it is inward and has its seat in the soul; it arises from the feelings of the mind itself, from virtuous affections, benevolent desires, holy feelings, heavenly hopes. Happiness

arises from condition; joy from character. Happiness derives its pleasure from receiving; joy in giving. If you take away the external blessings from a worldly man, you deprive him of his happiness, you make his condition unfortunate; but you cannot thus rob a good man of his joy, because his joy is a part of himself; it is independent of anything that is external. A man then may be placed in most unhappy circumstances and yet be glad; his condition may be miserable, and yet his character may be joyful. Thus it was with our Saviour; outwardly only sufferings; inwardly peace and joy. And thus it was with the blessed martyrs and confessors. They were exposed to trials, prisons, tortures, cruel deaths; yet they sang psalms in their prisons, gloried in their sufferings, rejoiced in their martyrdoms, and compared the fire which consumed their bodies to a bed of roses.

Now the unholy may have happiness, but they have not joy. Their condition may be fortunate; they may have riches, health, servants, equipages, friends, well-wishers and flatterers in abundance; but joy—true, calm, solid, abiding peace of mind they possess not; for this arises from a holy character. On the contrary, their souls are in a state of discord; they are liable to fretfulness, discontent, disgust, envy, self-reproach and gloomy fears. True they may be ignorant of the discord

of their souls, because, perhaps, nothing has occurred to disclose it. But take away all those blessings that are external, leave the man to himself, with nothing to fall back upon except the resources which his character affords, and he is miserable. Sin is the well-spring of misery, and the vices which actuate a wicked man will sooner or later bring forth the bitter fruits of sorrow.

But those who have embraced the Gospel with their hearts and are influenced by the spirit of the Gospel in their lives are possessed of joy. Jesus has communicated to them His peace: "My peace I give unto you"; and thus the discord in their souls is removed and peace is restored. Their outward condition may be unfortunate; but still they have an internal peace and joy to fall back upon, and thus are enabled to be cheerful, contented, joyful. And this is the joy which Jesus imparts to His people; His own joy, the joy not of condition but of character, the joy of holiness.

II. The joy of Jesus arose from a constant sense of the love of God.

He walked in uninterrupted communion with His heavenly Father. This supported Him in all His labours, inspired and animated Him in the performance of that difficult and painful work which He came into this world to accomplish. Even in that mysterious agony which seized upon Him before He expired, when a dark cloud ob-

scured from Him the love of God, He could yet pierce through that cloud and invoke God as His God.

Now those who do not realise the love of God can have no joy, no true peace of mind, however fortunate their outward condition may be. They may indeed forget God and succeed in banishing the thoughts of Him from their minds, and thus live a low, atheistical, thoughtless life in the world, without God and without hope. They may have so repressed every exalted principle as to enjoy an outward happiness, not much disturbed by any anxiety with regard to the future. But very often worldly men have their happiness disturbed with the apprehension of the future. They cannot conceal from themselves that their condition is not right in the sight of God, that they are not at peace with God, that something is wanting to make them secure; and they feel that death is certain, steadily approaching and unavoidable. God is the object of their fear, rather than of their love; they feel that they are sinners and that sin has exposed them to His wrath. And then there is the dread of a miserable eternity, the extreme awfulness of a future state.

Now it is evident that if a man could only be convinced that God loves him, that he has nothing to dread with regard to another world, that his salvation is secure, that heaven is the eternal home

to which he is journeying, he would be filled with joy and peace. And so long as he carried with him a sense of the love of God, earthly calamities would be borne with resignation and composure. The man who can look upward with confidence to God and without any presumption call Him Father, who feels that God loves him and that he in his turn loves God, must possess a joy greater than any earthly bliss that we can conceive. To him the comforts of life are the gifts of his Father's love, and even afflictions cease to be evils and are converted into blessings—the means of promoting his spiritual well-being.

III. The joy of Jesus arose from His self-sacrifice.

The sufferings of Jesus were voluntary; they were endured for the benefit of others; they were the outgoings of that infinite benevolence which dwelt within Him. He had entered upon a grand and glorious undertaking; even to save a lost world; to rescue millions of the lost and ruined race of Adam from sin and Satan and hell, and to restore them to holiness and God. This undertaking He had ever before His mind; this was the cause of every suffering He endured. Now the pleasure of accomplishing such a noble work must have far more than compensated for all the sufferings which He endured in its performance; it was this pleasure which caused Him cheerfully and

even joyfully to submit to shame, suffering and the cross. "He for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame." There is a joy in sacrifice; the very sufferings which we endure for the good of others are a source of joy; the exertions of a disinterested and benevolent mind are not only labours but pleasures. And thus if we think on all this, and consider that Jesus knew well the greatness and blessedness of that undertaking on which He had entered; that He foresaw its success in the actual salvation of men; we may in some measure understand why in the hour of agony He speaks of His peace and joy.

The selfish are entire strangers to this joy. The man whose love is centred on himself; who seeks his own happiness; however outwardly fortunate his condition may be, is a perfect stranger to true joy. The affections of his soul are dried up; he is generally cold, morose, forbidding, an object of dislike. There are in him no generous feelings, no large loving heart, no outgoings of the soul. He has isolated and cut off himself, not only from God, but from his fellow-creatures.

But there is a true joy in sacrifice—there are high and noble pleasures in the exertions of the benevolent man. In doing good to others he is doing good to himself. He enjoys the happiness

of doing good—the pure pleasure of benevolence. His affections become enlarged and the more objects they embrace, the wider is the circle of his joy. The greater the sacrifices we make for the attainment of some benevolent object, the greater the pleasure that that object when attained confers upon us. And in the very sacrifices themselves there are pleasures; there is the approval of conscience, the blissful exercise of generous affections, the sense of God's love, the feeling of peace and satisfaction. And then if we unite with all these pleasurable emotions the feeling of gratitude to Christ, that all the sacrifices we make in doing good flow from love to Him who died for us; that we are privileged to become fellow-workers with Him in His great design of saving a lost world; that our acts of self-denial are but the imitations of Him who for our benefit was nailed to the cross; we may see what is meant by the joy of sacrifice, and how the joy of Jesus remains with us in order that our joy may be full. Howard, when from love to Christ he visited dungeons and prisons in order to rescue his fellow-men from misery and crime, had far more real pleasure than the rich have in their abodes of luxury. And she also who, actuated by the same divine principle, visits the dens and lanes of our cities, the abodes of misery and filth and sin, in order to bring the Gospel to the fallen and de-

graded, and if possible to elevate them, has in this Christian work—this work of self-denial and sacrifice—far greater joy than she who mixes in the enjoyments of this world.

Thus then joy, so far from being incompatible with self-denial and sacrifice, often arises from it, and the very sufferings that are voluntarily endured for the good of others are converted into joys. Jesus Christ could speak of His joy on the night before He suffered. Paul and Silas sang psalms in prison. Believers in early times rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus. This is the solution of the apparent contradiction, not only that a man may be exposed to suffering and yet be a partaker of pure joy; but that these very sufferings, if voluntary and undergone for the good of others or for Christ's sake, are in themselves sources of joy. There is a joy in grief, a smile in the midst of tears, a pleasure in self-denial, a peace in trouble, a glorying in tribulation.

The secret then of true joy is love—love to God and love to our fellow-men. Love is that element which converts all things which it touches into joys; labours into delights, exercises of self-denial into pleasant services, sufferings into pleasures. Love saves us from the curse of selfishness, preserves us from a mean and contracted spirit, goes outward in acts of benevolence,

as a fertilising spring which gladdens all the neighbourhood. Love appropriates to itself the happiness of others, and by so doing augments its own; for when we love others, we share their happiness and rejoice in their joys. The more this blessed grace dwells in our hearts, the more we possess of true happiness; the more have we imbibed the spirit of Jesus Christ, and the more are we the partakers of His joy.

XII

THE HIDDEN LIFE

WHEN the apostle says "your life is hid with Christ in God" he alludes to the Christian's spiritual life. By nature men are in a state of spiritual death; there are no breathings of the soul after God. There are indeed religious feelings and sensibilities, but these are cut off from God. There is a God-consciousness in the soul, but only traces of it survive. But when a man is regenerated, a new life is implanted within him, he passes from death into life. God again becomes the life of the soul, and our religious feelings and sensibilities are fixed on Him, and find their true object in Him. Jesus Christ came to impart this spiritual life—a life which commences and is developed in this world, and is perfected in the world to come. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." This is vital Christianity, true, living religion, it is a new life in the soul. And hence the difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate is the immense difference which there is between

life and death; the one is spiritually alive, and the other is spiritually dead. Nor is this spiritual life, though hidden, wholly secret and concealed. It manifests itself by its actions. Just as our natural life is proved by the actions which can only be performed by living men, so the spiritual life is seen by those actions which can only be performed by the spiritual man. It is manifest to the man himself; he may by a careful examination of his feelings and conduct ascertain his possession of it. And it is manifest to the world; the holiness of Christians, their self-denying exertions for the good of others, the blamelessness of their conduct are proofs that they are actuated by a higher life than that which actuates worldly men. If there is no reformation in the outward conduct and internal feelings, it is an evidence that there is no spiritual life. Just as corruption is an evidence of natural death that life is extinct, so moral corruption is a proof of spiritual death, that the Spirit of Christ dwells not in the soul.

Still it is only a small part of this life that is visible, the greater portion of its manifestations is hid from the world, and the life itself, the internal principle, is concealed in the deep recesses of the soul. Most of the outward actions of the new life are done in secret. Such are the exercises of private devotion. "When," says our Saviour, "thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou

hast shut thy door pray to thy Father which seeth in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." If a portion of time is not daily devoted to private prayer, it is a proof that there is no spiritual life. So also in the devout perusal of the Scriptures the new life is nourished and sustained. Now all these are secret exercises, the world is ignorant of them, the soul is alone with God.

There are inward experiences of which the world knows nothing, and which even if it did know, it could neither understand nor appreciate. These experiences are not the habitual, but the occasional exercises of the hidden life. Sometimes the Christian is impressed with a deep sense of sin; its evil appears in a clear light, he is led to hate it with a perfect hatred, and to fight and contend against it. Sometimes he is filled with earnest desires after God; he experiences what the Psalmist meant when he said, "My soul thirsteth for God," he longs for communion with his heavenly Father, and, instead of reluctance to prayer, he feels a powerful impulse to that exercise. Sometimes there are violent struggles carried on within him, "the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh," the good and the evil contending for the mastery. Sometimes he is inspired with an earnest desire after holiness, after more purity of heart, more love to God and Christ,

more faith, more humility, more spirituality of mind. And sometimes there are made to him rich disclosures of the grace of Christ; the Saviour appears to him unspeakably lovely, and he is enabled to give vent to his feelings in the words of the apostle, "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee."

These, however, are only the actions of the spiritual life, the symptoms of its reality; but the life itself is different from its actions. This consists in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the direct author of the spiritual life; He it was who first implanted it, who quickened the believer from a state of spiritual death; and all the Christian's virtues are the fruits of the Spirit, the effects of His divine operation on the soul. But not only so, these virtues have in themselves no self-sustaining vitality; if the Spirit withdraw His grace, the believer will instantly relapse into a state of spiritual death. Hence the Spirit Himself must dwell in the soul. "Ye are not," says the apostle, "in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you."

In this consists the mystical union which there is between Christ and believers. It is the Spirit of Christ who dwells within them; the same Spirit who actuated Him when on earth, and who is inseparably united to Him in the unity of the

Godhead. Thus believers are one with Christ, because they are animated by the same Spirit, the same life which resides in the Head pervades all the members of the mystical body. He is the true vine and we are the branches; and the juice and sap of the vine extend to the remotest branches. Hence our life is said not only to be hid with Christ, but He Himself is represented as the Life. He is the Life of the world, and all spiritual life proceeds from Him as its fountain or source. So that the life of believers is not so much a change of disposition, a desire after holiness, and a struggle against evil, as the divine life implanted within them, the life of Christ in their souls; it is not so much they who live, as Christ who lives in them. "I am crucified with Christ," says the apostle, "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And this life is said to be hid with Christ in God; that as Christ resides in the bosom of the Father and as believers are united to Christ, so do they reside in God. There is a certain sense in which, in consequence of their union with the Son, the Father Himself resides within them. "If a man love Me," says our Lord, "he will keep My words; and My Father will love him and We will come unto him and make our abode with him." All this is certainly a great mystery, a mystery concealed, and which God has not been pleased to reveal; the life of the believer is a hidden life.

The Christian's life may also be said to be hid from the contrast which there often is between his outward and his inward life. Outwardly, the Christian may be poor and afflicted, whilst inwardly, he may be filled with divine life and heavenly peace, happy, and in favour with God. St Paul beautifully describes this contrast by a series of antitheses: "as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." Just, in like manner, as it was with the Redeemer Himself. Outwardly, and to all appearance, He expired on the cross in agony and shame, the most unvalued and despised of men, the prey to weakness, the victim of death; and yet, in the very act of doing so, He was triumphing over sin and all the powers of evil, satisfying eternal justice, and opening the gates of paradise to all believers, as if he were a mighty conqueror riding on his triumphal chariot.

But the Christian's life, though now hid, shall yet be manifested; there is not only a present concealment, but a future manifestation. "Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." Christ, now withdrawn from the world and concealed in the recesses of eternity,

shall be manifested; He shall appear a second time upon this earth, not in a state of disguise as a man of sorrows, but in glory as the Son of God. And the Christian's life shall be manifested with Him; all the disguises, and veils, and coverings, which now conceal it, shall be taken away; the secret works of piety shall be openly proclaimed; the inward experiences—the internal struggles against sin, the thirstings after God and the holy resolutions, shall all be acknowledged and rewarded, and the life itself shall burst forth from its chrysalis state with immortal freshness and beauty. The resurrection life, in reserve for believers in heaven, is not in reality a new life, but that life of which the spiritual life is the germ, the completion, the development, and the open manifestation. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is."

The spiritual life is permanent. When once implanted in the soul, it is never extinguished. It does not die at times and is again revived, but it remains in the soul as an abiding principle; the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, abides with the believer for ever. Hence it does not consist in mere religious emotions which are too often temporary and evanescent, the mere excitement of the affections which passes away as soon as the

object which caused the excitement is removed, but in principles indelibly impressed upon the soul, in fixed habits which cannot possibly be eradicated. And as the spiritual life is permanent, so also it is immortal. The life implanted can never die, it is the germ of eternal life, it is the resurrection-life of glory, begun on earth. The universe may combine to crush it, but it will prove superior to the universe, it will come off victorious. It is not like Adam's life of innocence ; that was entrusted to Adam's own keeping, and Adam lost it and it can never be regained or restored. But the life which Christ bestows upon Christians He Himself keeps and therefore Christians cannot lose it, "it is hid with Christ in God."

XIII

CHRIST THE LIFE AND LIGHT OF MEN

CHRIST is the life of the world. He is the way, the truth and the life. He is not only the source of all natural life as the Creator of the world, but especially the source of all spiritual life as the Redeemer of the world. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." He bestows life upon all who come unto Him. Faith is the living bond of connection to the Saviour, through which the current of spiritual life flows. When once the connection is formed, life is the result. In the incarnate Word is life; "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The same Spirit which dwelt in Christ dwells in believers. And hence all the holy actions of believers, all their devout thoughts and aspirations, all their works of faith and love, are not so much the actions of believers themselves, as the actions of Christ, done by His Spirit in

consequence of their union with Him. It is not so much they who live, as Christ who lives in them. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith of the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me." Christ lives in believers by His Spirit. He is the source of all their spiritual life; apart from Christ believers have no spiritual existence.

In this consists the mystical union that subsists between Christ and His people. Christ dwells in their hearts by His Spirit, and they are united to Him by faith. The strongest metaphors are employed to represent this union. Christ is the vine, and believers are the branches; and as the sap and juice of the vine reach even to the remotest branch, so does the life of Christ animate all His people. He is the Head and believers are the members, and the same life which resides in the Head quickens all the members of the body. Christ is said to dwell in the believer and the believer in Christ. This union is represented as a union with God Himself; by being united to Christ, the incarnate Word, believers are united to God. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God

in him." The believer feels that there is a vital union between him and the Saviour——that he has come into living contact with Him; that without Christ he can do nothing; and he is made humbly to confess that his sufficiency is in Christ, that his dependence is on Christ. He feels that His grace is sufficient for him, and His strength perfected in weakness.

Christ is the life of the saints under the Old Testament. By a careful consideration of various statements in the Old Testament we learn that as Christ was the life and light of the Christian Church, so He was also the life and light of the Jewish Church. Take, for example, the case of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. We have various statements of visions of God imparted to Abraham; as for example when God revealed to him the fate of the cities of the plain and when He interfered in the sacrifice of Isaac. Our Lord tells us that it was He Himself who appeared to Abraham. "Your Father Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad." So also we are informed that the angel of the Lord who guided the Israelites in the wilderness, defended them from their enemies, and brought them in safety to the promised land was Christ; the spiritual Rock which followed them, St Paul tells us, was Christ. Christ was the Mediator under the Old Testament dispensation as well as under the

New; He was the source of spiritual life not only to believers in the Christian Church, but also to believers in the Jewish Church; He was their life and light; so that in Christ those words of the Psalmist receive their realization, "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

The revelations to the Jews were not made directly by God, but by means of a mysterious Being called "the Angel of the Lord" who frequently appeared to the patriarchs and guided the Israelites in the wilderness, who assumed to Himself divine prerogatives, and was called by divine names. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Jacob when he was alarmed at the approach of Esau. "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for he said I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in the midst of a bush, and announced Himself to be the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The Angel of the Lord guided the Israelites in the wilderness. "Behold I send an angel before thee to keep thee by the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Take heed of Him and hearken to His voice; provoke Him not, for He will not pardon your transgression, for My name is in Him." And the Angel of the

Lord appeared to Joshua as the captain of the Lord's host, and demanded from him the same reverence as He did from Moses at the burning bush. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife, and revealed Himself by the name of Wonderful. In the prophecies of Zechariah there is frequent mention of the Angel of the Lord; He appears as the Lord's messenger assisting Joshua the high priest in the great work of rebuilding the temple, and contending with Satan the great enemy of God and man. And in the prophecies of Malachi the Angel of the covenant is announced as the Lord who shall suddenly appear in His temple. All these and many more are the manifestations of the Son of God, the divine Word, who afterwards became incarnate in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the beams of that divine Light which coming into the world lighteth every man. Under the Old Testament dispensation the Light shined through mist and darkness like the rays of light at dawn, the precursor of the rising sun.

Christ is the source of all good thoughts among the heathen—of those who lived outside the pale of revelation. All good in man, all his holy thoughts and purposes and aims proceed from Christ, the Light of the world; all these are rays, broken and fragmentary, of the Sun of Righteousness. It is the light shining in the darkness,

scattering the darkness with its rays, so that the virtues of the heathen, their high moral attainments, of Socrates, of Plato, of Cicero, of Epictetus, of Marcus Aurelius—those "seekers after God," instead of being as St Augustine represents them only "splendid sins" are the effects of Christ's Spirit, rays proceeding from Him who is the Light of the world. So also the glimpses of truth embodied in the religions, and still more in the lofty theologies of the ancient world are due to a partial illumination by the same Spirit. Take, for example, Socrates, the highest approach to virtue which was made in the heathen world. He often speaks of a divine monitor, an internal voice whose inspiration he followed, and on whose advice he relied. These men were Christians before Christianity, the disciples of Christ before He came into the world. They walked up to the light which they had, that light that lighteth every man. Justin Martyr insists on the Word of God, that is Christ, as influencing the thoughts of the heathen philosophers, and as the cause of their virtues. All that is true and beautiful in them must be traced to the divine Word as the life and light of men. The Word, he tells us, through Socrates condemned the errors of the Greek religion. Whatever either lawyers or philosophers uttered well was done by them through a contemplation of the Word; but since they did not

recognise all the teachings of the Word, who is Christ, they often contradicted each other. And thus it happened that heathen philosophy, as well as the Jewish law, acted the part of a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ.

There is a God-consciousness in man. Man as man is created in the image of God. There is a divine light enkindled within him. There is in every man a moral sense that discerns between good and evil. This is the great characteristic feature that distinguishes man from the lower animals. Man is a religious being; he is formed to love, serve and obey his Creator; there is a sense of God in the human soul, a God-consciousness. Even amid the extreme darkness of heathenism there are rays of light. Certainly gross darkness covers the nations, and it is very difficult to discern any rays of light in that darkness. There is an intuitive sense of God, a conscience in every man, and this conscience is the voice of God in the human soul, it is a ray of that Light which lighteth every man. In the striking language of Frederick Maurice: "There is a light within you, close to you. Do you know it? Are you coming to it? Are you desiring that it should penetrate you through and through? O turn to it! Turn from those idols that are surrounding you, from the confused, dark world of thoughts within you. It will reveal yourself to you. It will

reveal the world to you. What do you mean? asks the well-instructed, formally, habitually religious man; my conscience, I suppose. Call it that, or whatever you please, but in God's name do not cheat yourself with a phrase. I mean a reality; I mean that which has to do with your innermost being; I mean something which does not proceed from you or belong to you; but which is there, searching you and judging you. I mean that this Light comes from a Person, from the King and Lord of your heart and spirit, from the Word, the Son of God. When I say Repent; I say turn and confess His presence. You have always had it with you. You have been unmindful of it."

Thus then Christ is the Light and Life of the world. He is the Sun of righteousness shining in the midst of the darkness. All truth, all righteousness, all holiness proceed from Him. Christ is not merely the Head of His body the Church, but He is the King of the souls of men. He is the Spirit of all history. He regulates the events of the world. He rules and disposes all the affairs of men. Everything that happens is predetermined by Christ; He holds in His hands the destinies of the nations, and renders all things conducive to the accomplishment of His purposes. He is made Head over all things for the good of the Church. It is this living Christ in the world and in the soul

that explains Christianity and that is the reason of its success and diffusion. If it were not for Christ, the world and the Church would both perish. There is a Christian pantheism which contains a great truth. All things are not God, but all things are in God. "In Him we live and move and have our being." In Christ all things consist. There is a sense in which it is true that Christ is in every man. "In Him is Life, and the Life is the Light of men."

We may however shut our eyes to the Light. Just as we shut the eye of the body to the light of the sun, so we may shut the eye of the soul to the Light of Christ. "The Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." The Light shines around us, penetrates us, is within us; and yet we close our eyes so that its rays cannot reach us; we become blind and walk in darkness. We hate the Light and will not come to the Light lest our deeds be reproved. "If the Light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness." We may destroy our religious nature, as men destroy their mental nature. We may quench the Light of Christ within us. It is possible to harden our conscience; to offer the most determined resistance to its injunctions; never to hearken to it; to refuse to obey its commands; and then, it may be, conscience will cease to trouble us; it will become seared as with a

hot iron; the Light of Christ within us may be extinguished.

O Thou, Who art the Light of the world, in Whom only we can see light, shine into our hearts, dispel those clouds and mists and darkness which at present envelop us, so that we may walk as children of the light and of the day; impart to us the light of truth, the light of love, the light of holiness; in Thy light may we clearly see light.

XIV

THE FEAR OF DEATH

THE fear of death is universal. The love of life is one of the first principles of our nature which cannot possibly be eradicated. The worldly-minded tremble at the thought of death as the end of their joys. The thoughtful look upon it as a momentous event which presents more to their fears than to their hopes. And even the most righteous frequently dread their appearance before the tribunal of their Judge, and fear lest when weighed in the balance they should be found wanting. None of the graces of the Christian are here found in perfection. Although death is to him a vanquished enemy and he is delivered from its bondage, yet the perfect enjoyment of this deliverance is not attained in the present life. The more he advances in holiness the less dreadful will death become; but still as long as he continues in the body it will never be to him an object wholly devoid of terror.

Death considered in itself is an unpleasant subject. It is painful to human feelings, disagree-

able to human sensibilities, and mortifying to human pride. We represent to ourselves the pains of dissolution—violent struggles, dreadful convulsions, dying agonies, the tearing away of the soul from the body,—the extremity of pain more than nature is capable of enduring. And besides there are all the harbingers of death—prolonged sicknesses, agonizing pains, the body full of tossings until the dawning of the day. And although there is much of exaggeration in all this; although the pains of dying are not so dreadful as we suppose, yet we cannot disabuse our minds of the feeling, and are often tempted to say, "O Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." How disagreeable to him who is so eager in coveting the applause of men to think that he must soon be forgotten and leave nothing but his name written on his tombstone!

Death is terrible because it separates us from all that we loved on earth. Death separates us from our friends, from our pleasures, from our pursuits, and from our riches. But if death is terrible when we consider what it separates us from, it is still more terrible when we reflect on what it conducts us to. It conducts us to a mysterious world. The real sting of death is not death itself, not the agonies of dissolution, but the fear of future punishment. "The sting of death is sin." It is not death that we dread,

it is the justice of God which awaits us beyond it; it is because we fear lest He should take vengeance on our sins, our infidelities, our vices, and our crimes. If death were the mere extinction of our existence; if we had nothing to fear beyond it; if we were sure that there was no future state of punishment; death would not be nearly so terrible; we would dread it as the end of our existence, but its being the inevitable destiny of humanity would reconcile us to our fate. But it is the mysterious world to which death conducts us that we dread; that state of retribution where we know not what awaits us; that dreadful judgment of God where we will be examined regarding the actions of our lives, and where we will receive the due reward of our works.

These thoughts make such a powerful impression on many thoughtful persons, upon persons far removed from childish fear and superstition, that they are kept, as the apostle expresses it, "All their lifetime subject to bondage." They look upon death as the most terrible of all events. That they must enter into another world is a thought which completely unmans them, destroys all their pleasures, and poisons all the comforts of life. As, for example, Dr Johnson, who writes in a letter to Boswell, "I am extremely afraid of dying," and asserts that he never had a moment in which death was not terrible to him.

But there is a bright side of the subject: Christ delivers His people from the fear of death by His teaching. "He has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." He has declared that death is not the extinction of our being, that the soul is immortal, that it shall exist for ever with its faculties entire, and that even the body shall be ransomed from the grave, rendered immortal and reunited to the soul. And what an ennobling view has He given us of heaven? Not a paradise of sensual delights, not an earthly Elysium, not the heaven of Mahomet; but a state where the enjoyments are pure, spiritual, and refined; where union with God, the knowledge of His perfections, the eternal fruition of His love, the society of holy spirits constitute the elements of bliss, into which nothing that defileth shall ever enter, from which sinners are excluded not by arbitrary appointment, but by the very necessity of the case. Nor is this doctrine less consoling to His people under the loss of their friends. He informs them that death is not the dissolution but only a short interruption of friendship, and that friends, whose friendship is cemented by religion, shall meet and know each other in a better world, where nothing shall interrupt far less dissolve their communion.

Christ delivers His people from the fear of death by His own death. In order to vanquish

death, He Himself had to submit to its power; He had to enter the gloomy mansion of the grave, and to become for a season a sojourner in its domains. And thus by dying He has conquered death; by His precious burial He has deprived the grave of its gloom; He has vanquished this dreadful enemy in its own dominions; He has spoiled principalities and powers, and has arisen as a mighty conqueror from the tomb. Death then is to Christians a vanquished enemy; it is entirely subject to the power of the Redeemer. The dark valley through which they must pass is the same which the Saviour trod, the path by which He journeyed into the kingdom of God. The gloomy grave to which their bodies must be consigned was the resting-place of their Lord; the abode which He has consecrated by His presence. It is then no new, no unknown journey, it has already been traversed by their Forerunner. "Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus."

Christ delivers His people from the fear of death by His atonement. Death is the penalty of sin, but He came to put away our sins, and to free us from their penalty. He suffered in our room and stead; He offered up Himself as a sacrifice on the cross; and by His death He conferred on us a title to eternal life. He united humanity to divinity, and thus became a fit

propitiation for our sins. Thus uniting in His own mysterious Person the natures of God and man, He interposed between them, between our sinfulness on the one hand, and the wrath of God on the other, by expiating the one He appeased the other, and so finished transgression and made reconciliation for iniquity. Thus then Christians are delivered from eternal death the punishment of transgression. Death is not in reality terrible to them; its sting, which is the fear of punishment, is taken away, and it is the messenger of peace which calls the soul to heaven.

Christ delivers His people from the fear of death by His Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the purchase of His blood, and the fruit of His intercession; and it is His peculiar office in the economy of redemption to impart His influences to believers. Now the Spirit delivers us from the power of sin, which is the sting of death. He subdues our natural depravity, He diminishes the inordinate affection which we have for worldly objects, He moderates our desires and represses our passions, He makes the things of the world appear less valuable and less desirable, and thus renders death not so terrible considered as the separation from earthly enjoyments. He imparts to us new pleasures, new tastes, new enjoyments, all of which have reference principally to heaven, and which cannot be fully gratified

until we awake in God's likeness. He implants within us the principles of spiritual life by uniting us to Christ as our living Head; of a life which passes uninjured through the gate of death and emerges into the paradise of God. He gives us the assurance of salvation and informs us that after death we shall be eternally happy in another world.

But not only are the graces wrought within us by the Spirit our preparation for heaven, they are also the foretaste of its pleasures and the pledge of our admission. They are a pledge given by God that those upon whom they are bestowed will be finally glorified; they are the mark which God puts upon His own people. He who gives grace will also give glory; He will never utterly forsake the work of His hands but will carry it on to perfection. Nor are they only a pledge, but also a foretaste; the same in kind with the pleasures of heaven, differing only in degree. Grace in the soul is glory begun on earth, and glory is the perfection of grace in heaven. Thus Christians can look forward to death with a calm confidence, being assured that the mysterious world to which it conducts is to them a world of happiness.

Death then is not in reality a terrible object to believers. The circumstances which render death terrible ought not to render it terrible to

them. It is true that the pains of death and the humiliation of the grave are unpleasant subjects; but Christ supports His people in the hour of dissolution, and has Himself set them the example of dying. Death indeed separates us from worldly enjoyments; but the Christian's affections have long before this been fixed upon the things in heaven. The future world to which death conducts is indeed dark and mysterious; but the Christian's hopes are firmly fixed on the faithfulness of his God and the merits of his Saviour, and he knows that it will be to him a state of perfect happiness, where sin and sorrow are alike unknown. Thus he is enabled to meet death, if not with satisfaction, at least without dismay, and to unite with the apostle in saying, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

XV

CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S LIFE

"To me," says St Paul, "to live is Christ." We see here the high opinion which St Paul formed of the exalted nature of Christ—so high that he made Him the aim of his life. No one can read, however cursorily, the Epistles of St Paul without perceiving that Christ was the centre of his life; in short, that he was not merely an admirer, but a religious worshipper of Christ. If Christ were a mere man such a declaration would be an extravagant assertion; only on the supposition that Christ was a divine person can the apostle be vindicated from the charge of practising and inculcating idolatry. Christ was the chief end of his life because "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"—the Divinity had disclosed itself in humanity. How impious, for example, would such words appear when applied to Moses. The Jews were under the greatest obligations to Moses. He was their law-giver, the founder of their commonwealth, their deliverer from Egyptian bondage, the author of their

religion, even the mediator between them and God. Yet we never find any of the prophets expressing themselves of Moses as Paul did of Christ. Think how it would have sounded if Elijah, the reformer of the Mosaic law, had exclaimed, "To me to live is Moses." And so also we Christians are under greater obligations to St Paul than to any other of the apostles, yet we would regard it as impiety for a Christian to say, "To me to live is Paul."

Nor was this assertion a mere empty boast; it was the statement of a fact; St Paul's whole life was devoted to Christ; he could say without vanity and without fear of contradiction, "To me to live is Christ." From the moment of his conversion on the road to Damascus down to the moment of his martyrdom at Rome, he threw himself, heart and soul, into the cause of Christ; he lived to Christ only and to Christ wholly. He seemed to have had no private aims to gratify. Christ was his all in all. He was deeply impressed with a lively sense of all that Christ had done for him—the sufferings He endured to save him, His death on the cross for his sake, above all, His boundless grace in his conversion whilst a persecutor, choosing him to be an apostle, bestowing upon him spiritual gifts in such rich abundance, that out of gratitude he consecrated his ransomed life to the service of Christ. Justice also demanded his

services. Christ had sacrificed His life for him, and he felt bound to sacrifice his life for Christ; life for life; Christ's life for him and his life for Christ. He felt that he was no longer his own, that he was purchased by the precious blood of Christ, and therefore he and all that he had—all his powers and faculties and opportunities were Christ's. Never was there such a devoted self-sacrificing servant of Christ.

St Paul's devoted life is the example of what ours should be. Christ demands our lives as He demanded Paul's. We are His property; He has purchased us by His blood and redeemed us by His grace; He is the great King of the souls of His people. The same reasons which induced St Paul to live to Christ are equally binding on us. The claim of gratitude is the same; Christ died for us as well as for Paul, and bestows upon us as well as upon him the blessings of His grace. He has died for our sins, rescued us, if indeed believers, from wrath and final condemnation, bestowed upon us His Holy Spirit, implanted within us the rudiments of the divine life, and in a future world promises to give us greater blessings. And hence our whole life ought to be an offering of gratitude for all the blessings of redemption. The claim of justice is the same; we are not our own; we are bought with a price; Christ has given Himself for us, and therefore

we are bound to give ourselves for Christ. Everyone must, or at least should have some object to live for, otherwise life is insipid, useless, a mere dream, a delusion. And here is an object far superior to any which the world proffers; an object which will require the concentration of all our faculties, the employment of all our time, the devotion of our whole lives; an object which is inseparably connected with God's glory, the world's happiness, and our own salvation, the promotion of the cause of Christ, of a living Christianity in ourselves and others.

Christ is the pattern of the Christian's life. True religion is loyalty and devotion to Christ, and true piety is communion with Christ. We hold intercourse with Christ by means of the word and of prayer. And often when engaged in our daily duties we realize His presence, we feel that He is near to us, and that though absent in body He is present in spirit. Now we cannot hold a long and loving intercourse with any person without being assimilated to him; we are led, insensibly it may be, to adopt his views, to imbibe his opinions, to practise his virtues or vices, to imitate his example; and this influence of character is especially strong if the person with whom we have such intimate fellowship is our superior in intellectual abilities or moral worth. Now the same is true, in a still higher sense, of the soul's intercourse with

Christ; our character is gradually and imperceptibly moulded by His. We learn to practise those blessed virtues which He exhibited when on earth, to live in the sphere of His influence; in short, to live Christ, so that His life on earth is again in its principles lived over by us; we become "living epistles of Christ known and read of all men." The more communion we have with Christ, the more resemblance we bear to Christ.

By thus holding intercourse with Christ and imitating His example, we are led to imbibe His spirit, so that His life and character are impressed upon ours as the wax answers to the seal. A painter, by long and patient study of some great artist, not by slavishly copying his paintings but by reflecting on his peculiar qualities, at length catches somewhat of his spirit and exhibits some of the excellencies of the master; he is known as the disciple of Raphael or Titian. An author, by frequent perusal and critical examination of some famous writer, by discerning the beauties of his diction or the spirit of his philosophy, at length masters his style, imbibes his mode of thought, catches somewhat of the fire of his genius, so that he is known as belonging to a certain school. Now, in a similar manner, a Christian by meditating on the life and death of Christ, by pondering over His actions and graces, by discerning the principles which actuated Him, by

setting Him up as the model for his imitation, is led—not indeed as a mere copyist to do the same action, as, for example, to wash men's feet because the Lord washed those of His disciples—but to be guided by the same divine principles which actuated Him, to practise the same humility and condescension in a different form, as the Lord displayed in the above action, to exhibit the same unselfishness and love and earnest living, to imbibe the spirit of Christ, in a word, so to live Christ that all men are led to regard him as the disciple of the great Master, as belonging to the school of Christ.

Christ is also the origin of the believer's life. He is the origin of our life of pardon, of life bestowed upon criminals condemned to die. We have exposed ourselves to that penalty which the law pronounces against transgressors—the penalty of eternal death. And it is only by our deliverance from this penalty, in other words, by pardon, that we can live. Now Christ has procured this life for us; He became our substitute, He satisfied the claims of offended justice and vindicated the rights of a broken law, and thus, by reason of His interposition, we are pardoned.

Christ is also the origin of our life of holiness, of the life granted to a man supposed to be labouring under some mortal malady. We are all depraved, the prey of unholy passions and sinful desires, liable to spiritual death, incapable of the

service and enjoyment of heaven. And thus it is only by our deliverance from sin, in other words, by holiness, that we can be raised to spiritual life. Now this life Christ has also procured for us; He not only died for our sins but has procured for us the influences of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ; the Spirit whom He has purchased and whom He bestows upon His people, and by His communication we are quickened from a death in trespasses and sins.

But more than this, Christ is not only the origin of a life of holiness, but He Himself is that life in virtue of our union to Him by His Spirit. "I am," says the apostle, "crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me." Thus then it is not so much the believer who lives, as Christ who lives in him; he lives only because Christ lives. All holy actions of believers are the actions of Christ done by the assistance of His grace and the promptings of His Spirit. In short, Christ is the life of the believer, the origin, the sustainer, the inward principle of all spiritual life.

And as Christ is the believer's life on earth, so He is also the believer's life in heaven. Heaven is not so much a change of state as a step in advance; the same spiritual life which we live on earth is lived over again in heaven, but only purified and intensified. Throughout eternity

believers will be engaged in living for Christ and in imbibing His Spirit, for doubtless Christ will have a cause in heaven to promote, and the attainment of His character is an endless work. And so also believers will live in Christ, united unto Him, continually drawing out of His infinite fulness, even grace for grace. The chief happiness of heaven will consist in the full enjoyment of God in Christ; being with Christ, as St Paul expresses it, enjoying His friendship, living under the beams of His love, seeing Him as He is, and being changed into His image from one stage of glory to another. For heaven is not a state of stagnation but a scene of perpetual improvement, of endless progress in knowledge, holiness, and truth, in being more and more like Christ, continually approaching the standard of infinite perfection. Both on earth and in heaven to live is Christ, and the difference between these states of being is one of degree but not of kind. On earth we live Christ sadly, imperfectly—the copy is often marred; but in heaven we shall live Christ more perfectly—the copy will be cleaner and more correct.

XVI

OBSCURITY OF A FUTURE STATE

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." There is a veil which conceals the future state from our view, and that veil is not withdrawn until after death. It is just as if we always lived under a clouded sky, so that the heavens were continually hidden from our view; we might have heard of their glories, but if we had never seen them our conceptions of them would be vague and erroneous.

We meet with obscurity at the outset; the first step we take into the future world is a step in the dark. We are ignorant of the state immediately after death. When the soul leaves the body, to what unknown region does it take its flight? We are led to believe that the soul does not sink into a state of unconsciousness, but that its faculties exist in a state of activity; that believers when absent from the body are present with the Lord, and that to them death is gain because they are with Christ which is far better. But we can form no conception of the mode of

the existence of disembodied spirits. How can they hold communication with other spirits or with one another? The body is the instrument of the soul; it is through our corporeal senses that we can hold intercourse with one another; and if these are withdrawn, we can form no idea of what shall supply their place. Must the souls of the departed be thrown back upon themselves, and their intercourse confined to God and their own conscience? What is the nature of the state intervening between death and the resurrection? On these and many other questions revelation is entirely dumb and silent. We come at once to a stand; death is a very dark dispensation; no rays of light come to us from the tomb; there is nothing to grasp; we may "look for light but behold obscurity, and for brightness but we walk in darkness."

We are ignorant of the locality of heaven. We cannot conceive the idea of space in relation to disembodied spirits. Space necessarily supposes bounds, but bounds suppose figure and shape, and these ideas cannot be applied to mind or spirit. When our bodies are raised and united to our souls, there will be a locality for the blessed, but we are entirely ignorant as to where it is situated. It may be in this world purified from sin and fitted to be the abode of redeemed men; and, in favour of this opinion, one may quote the words of St

Peter, "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." Or, it may be in the sun, the centre of light and life to the whole system, the most glorious object in nature; or, in some distant star, more glorious than our sun; or, in the centre of the universe, the heaven of heavens, round which countless suns revolve with their attendant worlds encircling the throne of God.

We are ignorant of the mode of our future existence. Heaven may be a step in advance, the perfection of our earthly state; our faculties strengthened and purified, our affections freed from sin and their capacities enlarged, and our whole moral nature improved and advanced. Just as our manhood is in advance of our childhood, so in a similar way our future life may be in advance of our manhood; so that we shall live in heaven the same life which we lived on earth, only purified from moral evil and more exalted in its nature. Or, heaven may be a totally different economy, of which we can form no conception. It may be a state of being as different to us as the life of a butterfly endowed with new powers, soaring in the air and fluttering in the sunshine, is to the former life of the same insect, when it crawled upon the ground.

We are ignorant of the employments of the

blessed. "His servants," we are told, "shall serve Him." But what shall be the nature of their service? On this we obtain no information. Here many questions are unanswered. Are departed spirits cognisant of what is going on in this world? Are they those ministering angels who minister to the heirs of salvation? What is their sphere of well-doing? And after the resurrection what shall be the eternal employments of the blessed? On what missions shall they be engaged? In what ways shall they advance the cause of God? What intercourse shall they have with other worlds? What outlets shall they have to their benevolence? In all these matters we are perfectly in the dark; imagination itself is baffled.

It is a remarkable fact that we have no information concerning a future state given us in Scripture, coming from those who have been raised from the dead. It is generally affirmed that the world beyond the grave is a land from which no traveller has ever returned. But travellers have returned, and they bring with them no information. Not to mention other instances there is especially Lazarus who had been four days in the other world. Mention is made of him afterwards sitting at a feast with Jesus and His disciples, and we are told that the Jews flocked to see him; but we have no information regarding what he saw and

felt in his condition after death. If he ever spoke about it, it is certain that nothing has come down to us. And so also St Paul himself had a vision of heaven, whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell; but he gives us no account of what he saw or heard, perhaps because God restrained him, and probably also because human language was inadequate to do so; he just leaves us in our ignorance, and merely tells us that he was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Can we discern the reasons for this obscurity?

1. As a negative reason, revelation is designed to instruct us in the knowledge of our duty and not to gratify curiosity. Nothing is revealed for its own sake, but only with the design to influence our lives; in short, no information is given, but what has a practical bearing upon us. There are many things, especially connected with a future state, on which we would gladly obtain information, not revealed. And one probable reason of this is because such discoveries would have no great practical influence over us, or at least only such an influence as might indispose us for our duties in this world, or prove hurtful to our moral discipline, and therefore the information is withheld. Thus when our Lord was asked the most interesting question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" His answer was one of direct

practical application, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

2. It is impossible to make a positive revelation of the nature of heaven. We are not in a capacity to understand heaven; its pleasures, its employments, its nature are out of the sphere of our conceptions. All that could be done would be to describe heaven by images taken from earth, and this in some measure the Scriptures have done; but everyone feels that this is only a metaphorical description. If, as we have reason to believe, heaven is a totally different economy, it is evidently impossible for us to understand a positive description of it; there is nothing similar to which we can compare it. It is probable that not only will our present mental faculties—our judgment, memory, imagination be expanded, but that new mental faculties will be imparted to us, or latent faculties called forth into exercise, of the nature of which we can now form no conception. So also our raised bodies may not only possess the five senses in an extended form, but they may be endowed with new senses over and above. We could not, for example, explain the objects of sight to one born blind; our language would be to him utterly unintelligible, because there are no ideas in his mind to correspond to the words which we utter; and so, in a similar manner, an explanation of the nature of heaven would probably

be to us equally unintelligible. And this would be the case, even though we were to suppose, as many do, that heaven was merely a superior terrestrial state. Take a child or a person ignorant of the rudiments of science, and we would labour in vain to explain to him the Principia of Newton, or how to calculate the planetary motions. Now so it is with us; this present life is merely the infancy of our being, and we are incapable of understanding the manner of our perfected existence.

3. It is also to be considered that a partial concealment of the nature of a future state is necessary to faith as a moral discipline. It may be said that although it be impossible to explain the nature of heaven clearly, either from the weakness or from the defect of our intellectual faculties, yet several things and these of a practical tendency might be revealed; if, for example, intercourse were permitted between the two worlds, if departed spirits were allowed occasionally to visit this earth, it would settle for ever the question of immortality. But then whilst it would increase our knowledge, it would weaken the power of faith as a discipline of the soul. The obscurity of the nature of a future state is essential to a condition of trial. God leaves a certain obscurity in our views of immortality to try and test our faith; if this obscurity were removed, faith would

be injured, if not destroyed. Then, we shall know; now, we believe. We are called to journey to another country; its locality is concealed, its nature is not revealed, it is beyond the ken of mental vision, our only ground for believing in its existence is the testimony of God; God wishes that our faith in Him should be exercised, and that we should walk by faith and not by sight.

4. Ignorance of the nature of the future state is a beneficial exercise to trust in God's love and care. We are God's children, and He deals with us as such. In what He has for wise reasons concealed from us, we must trust our Father's wisdom and our Father's love. The reasons of the present concealment shall be made known to us. The experience of God's past kindness is a sufficient reason why we should trust in Him at all times. We can say with the Psalmist, Goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our lives; and surely we may have such confidence in our Father's love as to add, And we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. We are like children walking in the dark; we see not what is before us, or at best only a little way, and the night is cold and stormy; but we are led by a Father's hand; He is conducting us homewards by a way that we know not of; and the shadows shall yet flee away, the night shall soon

be over, and when we reach our Father's house, the eternal day shall dawn upon us.

5. Another reason for the imperfect revelation of a future state may be that a full disclosure would unfit us for the present world. We have strong and intimate relations which connect us with this world. We have worldly duties to perform and worldly cares to occupy our attention ; and these duties and cares are caused by the dispensation of God's providence. Now were the future state brought more sensibly before us ; were visits from the unseen world permitted and did extraordinary sensible interpositions from above or from below occur, we would be totally unfitted for the business of the world, and our minds would be in a state of perpetual distraction. Thus the Thessalonian converts, supposing that the day of Christ was at hand, and that an end was speedily to be put to the present state of things, were shaken in mind and troubled and fell into divers disorders. But especially it might follow that believers, seeing the exceeding great glory which awaits them in another world, their perfect freedom from suffering and sin, would get discontented with their earthly condition, would often indulge in murmuring, and be impatient under all the cares and worries of life.

It is however to be observed that although there is very much concerning a future state unrevealed, yet there is one fact revealed, and that of the

greatest practical importance, that the happiness of heaven shall consist in likeness to Christ. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

XVII

CHRIST'S TRIUMPH IN HIS CROSS

WE read in the Gospels the account of our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem. He was approaching the city, whither He was going with other pilgrims to celebrate what He well knew was to Him His last passover; Gethsemane and Calvary stood plainly before His mental vision. He was met at Bethphage by a great multitude of people, probably the Galilean pilgrims, who were also going up to the feast, and who received Him with acclamations. Others poured out from the gates of Jerusalem to meet and welcome Him. The multitude with one voice acknowledged Him as the Messiah. The air was rent with their acclamations. A strong enthusiasm seized upon the people. Some took off their garments and spread them on the way before Him. Others cut down palm branches and strawed them in the way. In crowds they went before, and in crowds they followed, shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest." Never did His prospects

appear so bright. Jerusalem appeared ready to receive Him as the acknowledged Messiah, the King of Israel. The prophecy of Zechariah seemed about to receive its fulfilment. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy King cometh unto thee; He is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

A week passed since His entrance into Jerusalem, when we read in the Gospels the account of another procession very different from the one from Bethphage to Jerusalem. This time also multitudes of people were seen; this time exclamations rent the air; the same voices which welcomed Jesus were heard a second time; but this time the shouts were not those of acclamation but of execration; this time the cry of the multitude was not "Hosanna to the Son of David," but "Away with Him, away with Him, Crucify Him, crucify Him; not "Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord," but "Not this man but Barabbas." And now the procession is formed; Jesus wounded, bruised, bleeding, carrying His cross; the multitude follow Him with their imprecations; they arrive at the fatal spot; they strip Him of His clothes; they nail Him to the cross; and He who a few days before was welcomed with shouts of triumph is now crucified between two thieves.

No thought of triumph at this time entered into the minds of the disciples; their hopes were disappointed; the cause, for which they had sacrificed all, appeared to be lost; their Master, whom they had fondly hoped to have seen seated on the throne of David, had fallen into the hands of His enemies and was perishing before their eyes. It seemed to them disaster and defeat. They had all forsaken Him and fled. Christ was exalted in a very different sense from what they expected, not to the throne, but on the cross. He had been treated in the most ignominious manner, blindfolded and spit upon, crowned not with gold or laurel but with thorns, clothed not with the purple robe of royalty but with the robe of shame, recognized as King of the Jews only by that title being inscribed on His cross.

And yet, strange paradox, this procession from the judgment hall of Pilate to the cross of Calvary was far more glorious than that other procession from Bethphage to Jerusalem, when the ground was strewed with flowers and the air rent with the hosannahs of the applauding multitude. The one was the triumph of patient constancy, heroic courage, and self-sacrificing love; the other demonstrated only the fickleness of the people. When Jesus was led forth from within the walls of Jerusalem, with the shame of spitting upon His scanty garment, with the mark of thorns upon His

brow, with His back furrowed with the stripes of the cruel scourge, faint and weary and too weak to carry that cross on which He was soon to be nailed, He was in reality triumphing over all the powers of darkness. To the outward eye His march was that of a malefactor to a cruel and ignominious death; but to the eye of faith it was that of a mighty conqueror on the march of conquest and victory; and when at length His eyes were dimmed with death and the words "It is finished" arose from His dying lips, the conquest was complete, the victory was gained. The cross is no more the sign of shame, the emblem of a cruel death, the fate of the most despised of men; it is the sign of triumph, the emblem of exaltation, and now men glory in nothing in comparison with the cross of Christ. It is in the last scene of His life, ignominious as men thought it at the time, that the brightest glory of His life is to be looked for; Christ upon the cross was then triumphing over the powers of darkness, trampling sin and Satan and hell under His feet, procuring redemption for His people, rescuing millions of the ruined race of Adam from perdition, throwing wide open the gates of Paradise to all believers, satisfying eternal justice, as if He were some mighty conqueror riding upon His triumphal chariot.

In the Gospels we read that Christ was once transfigured. On the holy Mount His face did

shine as the sun and His raiment was white as the light. The veil which concealed His Godhead was for a time uplifted. Celestial visitants, Moses and Elias, attended Him, and the voice of the Eternal proclaimed Him to be His only begotten Son. But the glory of the crucifixion was greater than the glory of the transfiguration. The glory which shone from Calvary is to the eye of faith brighter and more overpowering than that which shone from the holy Mount. Then His face shone as the sun, but on Calvary the full brightness of the glory of God shone forth; the glory of God was seen in the face of Christ crucified. This was a manifestation of God's glory before which the sun hid its face. When Christ was exalted on the cross, the glory of God shone forth more brightly than in any of His other works or dispensations. All the perfections of God shone forth together, mingling their rays in one bright effulgence of glory. And thus it is that the marred visage of Jesus is surrounded with a glory which fills the mind with amazement and awe.

It is by the cross of Christ that His great victory has been obtained; His death is the source of life and joy to countless myriads of the human race; His real triumph was not His entrance into Jerusalem, but His exit from Jerusalem when He suffered without the gates. It was then that He achieved His victory over the powers of darkness.

"Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross." Then He led captivity captive and received gifts from men. Then He caused Satan to fall like lightning from heaven. Satan thought that he had overcome Christ when he induced Judas to betray Him, Peter to deny Him, and the Jews to crucify Him; but all this served only for his own overthrow. It was by His death that Christ destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil. It would appear that before the death of Christ Satan exercised more power over the world than he now does; he not only influenced the souls but he possessed the bodies of men; never was there an age of such extreme wickedness; humanity lay helpless and bleeding and panting under the power of the devil. But, since the death upon the cross, a restraint has been put upon the powers of evil. Jesus Christ is now the Prince of this world. It is, alas, too evident that wickedness still prevails; and there have been periods, as in the great French Revolution of last century, when Satan was loosed out of his prison; but the cross of Christ has secured the final triumph of righteousness; the day shall yet dawn upon this world when Satan's kingdom shall be destroyed, and when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

The redemption of the world flows from the cross of Christ. Our salvation is inseparably connected, not with the life, but with the death of Christ. It is the blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth from all sin. By His cross Christ has satisfied the justice of God, magnified the law and made it honourable. The cross is the object of the sinner's faith, the anchor of the sinner's hope, and the source of the sinner's joy; and it is the language at once of his heart and life: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world."

In the cross of Christ we behold the highest triumph of self-sacrificing love. The man who by his might and achievements, by his superior power and abilities, by his eloquence and force has earned the approbation of his fellow-men, who is ever followed by admiring multitudes, and whose approach is welcomed by acclamations of joy, is raised to a high position of dignity; but greater far is the man who sacrifices himself for the good of men, who plunges into misery and want to save others, who gives up all—comfort, honour, applause, joy, to benefit his fellow-men, who welcomes contempt, dishonour, the cross, if thereby he might rescue men from misery and crime; that man has obtained a greater triumph, achieved a more splendid victory. Now thus it was with

Christ. His entrance into Jerusalem with the acclamations of the multitude was no triumph to Him; His death on the cross with the execrations of the people was His noblest victory. And who can estimate the greatness of His self-sacrifice. We can only discern the deliberate choice of the cross, the deliberate renunciation of all the joys of life, the deliberate endurance of suffering; but we cannot estimate the intensity of that love which induced Him to veil His Godhead and to take upon Himself the form of a servant; we cannot fathom the depths of that humiliation to which He descended when He became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. The surrender was complete; He gave Himself for us; the victim came willingly to the altar; "Lo," says he, "I come to do Thy will; Thy law is in my heart." The world's glory pales before the glory of the cross.

And as the cross is the true glory of Christ, so is it also the true glory of His disciples. Not merely must we glory in the cross of our Lord, but we ourselves must take up our cross and follow in His footsteps. We must drink of the cup of which He drank and be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized. He has redeemed us with His precious blood. We are His purchased servants. We must live devoted, consecrated lives; self renounced and Christ only

exalted. And surely we need no other motive for this than the love of Christ; "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again."

XVIII

MYSTERY OF THE PRESENT AND MANIFESTATION OF THE FUTURE

MAN is proud of his boasted attainments in knowledge. He has made vast discoveries in nature; he has deciphered its characters and read its secrets; he has rendered its laws subservient to his purposes; he has made the lightning his messenger; he has so adapted machinery to natural laws that he can now dispense with much of human labour; he has studied the anatomy of the human frame, and can describe the wonderful mechanism of the body; he has penetrated into the distant past, and revealed those series of creations which once peopled this globe. And it is with thankfulness admitted that great progress has been made in knowledge, especially in these later years. All honour to those master spirits who have opened to us the book of nature and read its secrets, who by patience and unwearied research have given such an impetus to science. But after all, in spite of all our boasted attain-

ments, how little do we know! On all sides we meet with difficulties which resist all our efforts to solve. On every subject to which we direct attention, we encounter a barrier beyond which we cannot pass. Questions continually arise which are perfectly inexplicable. And the more enlightened a man becomes, the more does he see his ignorance. We are like persons shut up in a narrow valley, bounded on each side by lofty mountains whose tops are lost among the clouds, utterly ignorant of the great stretch of hill and valley which lies beyond these mighty masses. Or, to change the image, we are like those who walk in a mist; we see the mere outlines of objects, and even these outlines are distorted out of all proportion, and take the most fantastic shapes.

We have only to reflect on ourselves and we meet with mystery at once. There is the dark mystery of this utterly incomprehensible being. What am I? Whence came I into this world? What is life? What is thought? What is the soul? And then there is the mystery of personality—that each of us is a separate individual, distinct from others, dwelling alone, and surrounded with other personalities—living, breathing, thinking, in this age and nation, the mysterious now. And as there is the mystery of life, so there is the equally dark mystery of death.

Being after being drops into nothingness; the mysterious principle of life is extinguished; those who live and breathe and move among us vanish one by one from the stage of earthly existence. What is this death? What is beyond it? What about personality after death? All is mystery. "We look for light, but behold obscurity; and for brightness, but we walk in darkness."

There are also dark mysteries in Providence. We cannot open our eyes in this mysterious world, but we meet with profound secrets past finding out. Sin, and its horrible offspring of evils crime and wickedness, are ever before us; and what an unsolvable problem is the existence of moral evil —a problem which has puzzled mankind from the first dawn of reason down to the present day. There are events continually occurring, the reason of which we cannot perceive; mysterious dispensations of Providence which are utterly bewildering and perplexing. It is as if we were viewing a piece of machinery, of which we saw only a small portion, the rest being in another room; we may guess the use of a few of its wheels and trace the connection of a few of the movements made; but the greater number of these wheels and movements are wholly inexplicable because connected with other portions of the machinery which we do not see, and the motive power itself, which gives rise to the working of the machinery, is

concealed from our view. Just so is it with Providence; for Providence is one vast scheme, reaching from eternity to eternity, embracing men, angels and devils, and including the history of other worlds besides our own.

There are the dark mysteries of religion. There is the mystery of the Supreme Being; His perfections, His eternity, His immensity, His omnipotence, to us finite beings utterly incomprehensible. We feel ourselves surrounded on every side by God, but unless it were for the disclosures of revelation we would remain utterly ignorant of His nature. But even revelation itself is full of mysteries; its very disclosures, whilst they show us the truth on some dark points, reveal other points equally dark, and on which they cast no light; just as when a man makes progress in knowledge and solves certain problems, new problems arise, of whose existence he was formerly unaware, and which admit of no solution. How dark are our conceptions of the great mystery of godliness, "God manifest in the flesh," of the nature and efficacy of the atonement, of the mode of the operations of the Holy Ghost, of the agreement between divine foreknowledge and freewill, or between human inability and moral accountability? And then there is the darkness which rests on futurity, the nature of the happiness of the righteous,

and of the misery of the wicked—the extreme awfulness of our condition beyond death.

And hence it is that apart from the disclosures made by Christianity, life must appear to a reflective mind very dark and gloomy. To the intelligent heathen, to the learned Greeks and Romans, surrounded with all the evils of life and without any certain hope of immortality, the victims of inevitable death, and beyond all, darkness, life must have appeared most miserable. And hence we do not wonder at a certain philosopher of modern times, who had lost his faith in Christianity, reducing the evils of life into a system, and regarding the life of man as the very climax of misery, and this world not as the best but as the worst of all possible worlds. We have only to look at the evils of life, to fix our eyes upon them, and this world will appear one vast infirmary, where men are tortured with pains, have to submit to horrible operations, or are waiting to be operated upon. We have only to look at the sins and crimes that are perpetrated, and this earth would appear as one vast prison, filled with miscreants, all under sentence of death, waiting for the period of their execution. Now this gloomy view of life is not without some truth; and apart from Christianity, life appears very mysterious and perplexing.

But although darkness encompasses us on every

side, yet we are not as persons shut up in a dark dungeon, whose walls have no windows or chinks through which the rays of the sun stream in. All is not darkness; we may retain the image of a dungeon, yet there is light in our dungeon. "We see through a glass darkly," but which, however dimly, yet truly reveals the objects of vision. That glass is the blessed Gospel, those revelations God has made known to us in His Word.

Faith is the great grace which God requires us to exercise in the present world; it is the instrument which saves us, delivers us both from the guilt and power of our sins; it is the life of our souls. As we cannot walk by sight, we must walk by faith. And this faith must be exercised in contrast to the unassisted powers of human reason. Thus in all the intricacies of Providence, when the night is dark and stormy, when disease and sorrow and bereavement invade our dwellings, we must still cling to a Father's love and to a Father's wisdom. In all the mysteries of revelation, in all our doubts and difficulties and perplexities, we must still cleave to the truth of the divine declarations, taking God's Word on trust, receiving all the doctrinal statements of that Word as the true and faithful sayings of God. And hence we need not much perplex ourselves either with the intricacies of Providence or with the mysteries of revelation, but exhibit a childlike disposition exercising trust

in God. What we know not now we shall know hereafter. The mystery of the present will be followed by the manifestation of the future. Now is the season of ignorance; then is the period of knowledge. "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face."

In heaven we shall obtain the solution of many of the mysteries of Providence which at present perplex us. Now we believe that although clouds and darkness surround the ways of God, yet judgment and justice are the habitation of His throne. But in Heaven these clouds and darkness will be dispelled, and we shall know and see the justice of the Lord. Dark things will be brought to light; oppressions will be redressed; crimes and wrongs and frauds will be punished; and the ways of God will be justified before men. Obscurities will be removed; what now appears to us to be dark and unintelligible will be rendered plain, and the full light of truth will be thrown upon the great problems of this world's history. We shall be enabled to trace our personal history; clearly to discern the way by which the Lord has led us; how what we considered the heaviest calamities were but blessings in disguise; how what we regarded as misfortunes were in reality some of the greatest mercies which God has conferred upon us. All shall be revealed and fully justify our trust in God. In this world we believe, but in

Heaven we shall know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

In Heaven we shall obtain the solution of the mysteries of religion, so far at least as these can be disclosed to finite spirits. The revelation now made to us may be supplemented by additional revelations, new disclosures of the ways of God. The great problem which has puzzled the human race, the existence of moral evil, may then be revealed. The nature of Christ, the mysterious union of the divine and human in His Person, may then be disclosed. The bond of union between us and God—that spiritual nature which renders us susceptible of religion and capable of being acted upon by the Holy Ghost, may then be understood.

Observe the difference between our present and future knowledge—the mystery of the present and the manifestation of the future—the now and the then. "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face." Now, prejudices conceal the truth from us; they weaken the eye of the soul; they cause us to look upon spiritual objects with a distorted vision. But then, the prejudices will be removed; the films which spoil our vision will be taken away; our mental eye will be restored to its healthy state and we shall be enabled to see spiritual objects in their true proportions. Now, we are greatly impeded in the pursuit of truth by our bodily infirmities; we have to devote most of

our time to attend to the inferior interests of our bodies; our mental powers are weakened by the frailties of our corporeal nature. And when we have made some little progress in knowledge, death comes and puts an extinguisher upon our attainments. But then, there will be nothing either to hinder the acquirement or to impair the enjoyment of knowledge; our glorified bodies will no longer be hindrances, but helps to the mind. Now, our knowledge is sadly imperfect; it is little that we do know, and even that little we know but imperfectly; this present life is but the infancy of our existence. But then, we shall attain to our spiritual manhood, and no limit can be assigned to the attainments which we shall make in knowledge. Now, what little we do know is often the result of much painful study and laborious acquisition; we have to work, and toil, and sit up late, and submit to much hard labour. But then, these mental labours will be greatly lightened; our mental powers will be strengthened, and the exercise of our faculties will be no longer a toil but a pleasure. Now, we encounter in our studies obstacles which we cannot surmount, questions which we cannot answer, problems which we cannot solve; we are made painfully sensible of the weakness of our mental faculties, and are often forced to relinquish our pursuits. But then, many at least of these obstacles which stand in our way

in the pursuit of truth will be removed; many of those now unsolvable problems will be solved; many of those mysteries will cease to be mysteries by being disclosed.

In heaven, as in earth, our knowledge will be progressive. Indeed much of the happiness connected with knowledge arises, not so much from its possession, as from its progressive acquisition. The possession of knowledge soon satisfies; the progressive acquisition of knowledge stimulates, whilst it gratifies the appetite for truth. Probably a great part of the happiness of the blessed will arise from making new discoveries in the works of God. The redeemed will continually advance in knowledge and be discovering fresh topics for wonder and admiration and praise. Nor can any limits be assigned to their attainments. The works of God are infinite; there are innumerable worlds to visit and explore, and eternity itself will not suffice to enable the redeemed to understand the whole of the ways of the Almighty.

Heaven is the eternal abode of truth. There God, who is the Truth, has established His kingdom of glory; there Christ, who is the great King of truth, resides; there the Holy Spirit of truth guides its inhabitants into all truth; there the angels, those spirits of truth and love, surround the throne; there redeemed men, the children of the truth, make their eternal abode. Heaven is

the region of pure light, and in it is no darkness at all. "And the city had no need of the sun neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it."

XIX

THE INSIGHT OF LOVE

"EVERYONE that loveth is born of God and knoweth God." In order to know any person thoroughly, there must be a certain similarity of disposition. The mere intellect, be it ever so acute, cannot fathom a man's character—cannot penetrate into the depths of his moral nature; we must by sympathy enter into his feelings, throw ourselves into his character, before we can understand him. A man who is not himself holy cannot understand the holy; he is sure to misinterpret his actions; he will distort their motives in accordance with his own worldly views; he will attribute the motives which chiefly actuate himself to them; and if he finds that these fail to account for their actions, these actions will remain to him completely inexplicable. And what is true of our knowledge of our fellow-men is also true of our knowledge of God in Christ. The greater our resemblance to Christ, the greater our knowledge of Christ. Thus then love gives a man an advantage which is possessed by no other grace, for God

is love and Christ is the incarnation of love. And thus it follows that he who loves has a spiritual insight into the character of God. Love sees God, because love is the reflex of His character. The more we love, the more we know.

Love imparts liberty of action. The moral law, apart by itself, is not one of liberty but of prohibitions and commandments; a law whose declarations are, "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not." But such prohibitions and commandments are not necessary to love. We need not say to love, "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not commit adultery," "Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," "Thou shalt not covet"; love knows all this well enough already; it would do nothing to injure its neighbour; these prohibitions are not necessary for it. So that, as the apostle says, "Knowing this that the law was not made for a righteous man but for the lawless and disobedient," we may say, the law was not made for love but for selfishness and hatred. The restraints of the moral law are no restraints to love, because love is previously inclined to obey; and the commands of the moral law are no injunctions to love, but the expressions of love's desires. Love is itself the spirit and principle of obedience. That which is bondage to one man is freedom to another, and the absence or presence of love makes all the difference.

Love dissolves doubts in practice. Love does not dissolve mental doubts — speculative doubts and difficulties. When these belong to the mind, and not to the heart, they must be met and solved by the mind. But even with regard to them love imparts confidence in God, and enables us when we cannot see our way to depend on God's promises. But it is with regard to the doubts and difficulties of the heart that love is concerned, and with regard to them love is a dissolver of doubts. Many such difficulties and perplexities arise in actual life as, for example, whether such a line of conduct is right, whether such amusements are injurious or innocent, whether such company is to be shunned or cherished, whether such actions are to be done or left undone, whether such a pursuit is to be engaged in, and all the thousand questions of Christian casuistry. On all these the intellect balances the reasons for and the reasons against, and after all it can often come to no decision. But love has an intuitive perception of duty; its impulses are in general clear and distinct; and whilst reason is perplexed, it arrives at a correct conclusion. Love sees through difficulties, disentangles perplexities, and removes obstacles. With it the will of Christ is paramount; whatever is agreeable to the will of Christ is right, and whatever is not agreeable is wrong. That company into which we dare not ask Christ

to go with us is to be avoided, and that amusement on which we cannot ask the blessing of Christ is wrong. So also every amusement, every company, every course of action which draws away our affections from Christ, or interrupts our communion with Him, is prohibited. And more than this, love imparts a disinclination to those pleasures and pursuits which are wrong, and an inclination to those which are right, and thus love is like an enlightened conscience, a discerner between good and evil.

Love dissolves prejudices. Prejudices obscure the eye of the mind, so that it cannot clearly discern the truth, or rather they so distort our mental vision that we discern false objects. And especially there is no department where prejudices exert so pernicious an influence as that of religion. These cause us to hate the light, so that we will not come to the light lest our deeds be reproved. Our eyes are thus blinded so that we cannot discern the truth either concerning ourselves or concerning Christ. Now prejudices spring chiefly from selfishness; they are connected with our own opinions and interests; we do not seek to know the truth, but only what can be said in defence of our opinions or in favour of our interests. But love is the antagonist of selfishness, and therefore dispels those prejudices to which selfishness gives rise. Love causes us to look not on our own

things but also on the things of others. Love especially exalts the interests of Jesus Christ and His kingdom above our own interests, and causes us to aim at the promotion of His glory. Like the sun which rises in the heavens, and with its bright rays dispels the mists which have settled on this lower world, shows us the mountains and the valleys and the rivers as they really are, and divests them of those fantastic shapes in which they formerly appeared to us, so love dispels the mists of prejudice, clears the inward sight, and makes us see things in their real proportions.

Love sees the reason of trials. When all is apparently dark around the Christian, when bodily affliction seizes upon him, and he is confined for months, and it may be for years to the couch of weakness and pain, or when he meets with severe disappointment and his most fondly cherished schemes end in failure; or when his beloved friends, those whom he loved better than himself and on whom he leant, are taken from him by death, or when he is reduced from comparative affluence to the straits of poverty; love enables him to penetrate through this darkness, and to see in all his afflictions the kindness and the wisdom of his Father in Heaven. And even when he cannot discern the purposes of his trial, love constrains him to believe that God does not afflict him unnecessarily, that his heavenly Father knows

what is best for him, and that what he does not know now he will know hereafter.

We should follow the impulses of Christian love. Our conduct ought not certainly to be wholly impulsive; the reason, as the regulative faculty, should assume the command; knowledge should ever accompany practice. But in religion the highest knowledge is not that which springs from the intellect but from the heart, from love to Christ. This imparts clear views of duty, shows the way that we should go, and is a light to our path. Whatever love to Christ impels us to do, we should yield to its constraint; it should dwell in us as a grand ruling commanding principle; at once the light of our heart and the spring of our actions. Our lives should be spent in entire devotedness to Christ, His great love to us should inspire our love to Him; and thus, inspired with love to Him, we should live no more unto ourselves but unto Him who died for us. How mighty the energy of love to Christ, when once it has taken full possession of the soul! What views of God's character, of His mercy and justice does it discern; what knowledge of divine things does it impart; what costly sacrifices of time and money does it make; what works of labour and self-sacrifice does it perform; what tortures and deaths and martyrdoms does it endure; what victories and triumphs does it effect! Love to Christ has re-

deemed this world from selfishness, has converted thousands of the human race into noble characters, has transformed persecutors into apostles, has of sinful men made devoted missionaries and heroic martyrs, and has peopled heaven with its inhabitants. Love to Christ has conquered the strongholds of Satan, and diffused the light of truth into the darkness of heathendom. Love to Christ has proved an instrument mightier and more effectual far than power or knowledge or foresight, and has conferred more benefits on the human race than any other influence in the spiritual world.

XX

THE NATURE OF FAITH

FAITH shines among the other graces with a superior lustre even as the moon among the lesser lights of heaven. It animates, regulates, and pervades the whole of the Christian's life. He is said to live by faith, to stand by faith, to walk by faith, to overcome the world by faith, and to die in faith. With this grace our salvation is inseparably connected; this is the condition required of us before we can be interested in the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. The answer to the inquiring sinner is "Believe and thou shalt be saved." And not only is our forgiveness inseparably conjoined with faith, but also our holiness. Faith is the first principle of spiritual life in the soul of man, it is the root of all graces, the origin of all holiness, it works by love and purifies the heart. All our Christian virtues are derived from it; all our Christian duties depend on it. Faith unites us to Christ as our living head, and out of His fulness we receive even grace for grace. Such is the supreme importance of faith; its presence

or absence determines our spiritual condition; with faith we are already saved, without faith we are already condemned.

Faith is a belief in testimony; it has reference to a testimony delivered; so that if there be no testimony, there can be no faith. There may be the mental faculty of believing, but faith itself cannot exist without some object to which it is directed. Faith is either human or divine, according as the testimony comes from man or God. Religious faith is a belief in the testimony of God. The Testifier is God; it is His testimony, His revelation, His word. As we credit the testimony of men, so in like manner we are to credit the testimony of God; as we take men at their word, so we are to take God at His, only with this difference, that the word of God affords surer ground of confidence than the word of man.

Religious faith then is a belief in the testimony of God, and the testimony of God is contained in His word, hence the apostle calls the Gospel a testimony, and describes faith as a belief in that testimony. "Our testimony among you was believed." The word is the only rule of faith; and our faith is only correct and genuine when it is connected with it, when it has reference to some statement in the word, or to some promise revealed. The Scripture comes to us in the form of a testimony; and faith consists in receiving it

as such. Indeed faith cannot go a single step beyond the Word; where God has said nothing, nothing can be believed; where there is no promise on which to trust, our confidence is presumption.

Faith relates to things unseen. Faith is the substance or confidence of things hoped for; the evidence or conviction of things not seen. Faith is opposed to sight; its objects are things invisible to our senses. All the objects revealed in Scripture are unseen. We never saw the great God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, or the future abodes of men; all these are the objects of faith and not of sight. Many wish that it had been otherwise—that our salvation depended on what we saw rather than on what we could not see. Surely the former would have had a far mightier influence over us; surely we would strive to enter heaven and avoid hell, were heaven and hell always present before our eyes. If we could but see God and Christ, all our doubts would vanish, and we would then feel religion in its full force. But not to mention that many of the objects of faith are incapable of being seen by our bodily eyes; even if they were seen, it is doubtful whether they would have such an overwhelming influence upon us. We would become familiar with them, and the depravity of our hearts would manifest itself in their very presence.

Faith relates to things not discernible by

reason. By reason we deduce one truth from another; it always proceeds from truths already admitted to truths more remote; but if it has no data to proceed upon, it must be silent, it can neither affirm nor deny. Now the objects of faith are all above reason. They are not discoverable by it, they are beyond the reach of its faculties. The Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead, the mercy of God to a sinful race, the method of forgiveness through the atonement of Christ, the work of the Spirit in the soul of man, the resurrection of the body, and the nature of the future state, are all objects not of reason but of faith. On these important subjects we would have been for ever ignorant, had not God revealed them to us in His Word. But yet it must not be supposed that there is any contradiction between faith and reason; on the contrary, as far as they relate to each other, they completely harmonize. Faith is, as it were, a higher faculty; its objects are sublimer truths than reason can discover; it reaches further than reason can go or dare venture; and, where to the eye of reason all is darkness, it casts the light of truth. It is to reason the eye of the soul, what the telescope is to the eye of the body; it assists our intellectual vision and enables us to perceive more distinctly what we already saw, and to discern truths of which we were ignorant. It

illuminates and enlarges the range of mental vision.

The influence which faith has upon us differs according to the nature of the truths believed. If these truths have no interest to us; if it is a matter of indifference whether they are true or false; if they can have no practical bearing upon our conduct, our faith in them will exert no influence over us. Such, for example, is the case with most of the facts of past history and the propositions of mathematics, concerning them nothing more is necessary than to perceive and assent to their truth. But if the testimony has a close and intimate connection with us; if its truth or falsehood strongly affects our happiness; if it has a direct practical bearing upon our conduct, our faith in it will necessarily exert an influence over us. Now such is the nature of the truths of religion; they are great practical doctrines; they affect not merely our temporal but our eternal happiness, and hence our faith in them must be active and practical. There is revealed to us a frightful destruction which threatens us and a way of escape; if then we really believe in our danger and in the method of our deliverance we will act upon our belief, we will fly for refuge to the hope set before us. There can be no real faith in the momentous truths of the Gospel without their exerting a

corresponding influence over us; if no influence is exerted, it is a proof that we do not believe them.

Thus religious faith includes something more than the mere exercise of the understanding; it is not only a belief in the testimony of God as contained in the Word, but an active belief in that testimony. This arises from the nature of the truth believed. If we were required to do nothing, then faith would be a simple exercise of the intellect. But if we are required to act, then faith to be of any use must be active. Hence there must be, along with the exercise of the intellect in understanding and assenting to the testimony, the exercise of the will in acting upon it. The truths of the Gospel are only believed as they influence our hearts or lives; and it is this practical influence that imparts to religious faith all its value.

If there is a word by which religious faith can be described in its nature or exercise that word is trust. And hence it is that this grace is called trust in the Old Testament. The saints in the Old Testament were eminent for their faith. But their faith is expressed by another word trust, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee," thus proving that the trust of the Old Testament is the same as the faith in the New.

Works are the evidences and inseparable effects of faith. If there are no works it is a proof that

there is no faith. Faith must operate; it is an active practical principle; if it is real, action must follow as a necessary consequence. No man can by any possibility believe that he is in a lost and ruined state, and that Christ came to save him from that state, without repairing to Christ as his Saviour. No man can believe that there is an eternity of happiness or woe before him—a heaven to gain, and a hell to avoid—without doing his utmost to prepare himself for another world. If religion produces no influence upon him, its truths are not believed by him.

The Lord Jesus Christ, in His mediatorial capacity, is the great object of saving faith. Saving faith does not differ in nature from other kinds of faith, but in the truths believed. It also is a belief in testimony, and this is the testimony that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that whosoever believeth in Him shall be saved. Man is described in Scripture as guilty and condemned; and the death of Christ, we are repeatedly informed, was an atonement for our sins—an expedient devised by God whereby He might be just and yet the justifier of sinners. It is only on the ground of this atonement that we can escape the punishment of sin; Christ is the only way to the Father, the only name under heaven whereby we can be saved. This is our refuge in the time of danger, the remedy provided

for our spiritual maladies. Sin is the disease, and the Gospel is the revelation of the remedy. If then we believe this testimony of God and comply with the remedy, we shall be saved ; if we do not believe and thus reject the remedy, we are condemned already. Hence it is that salvation is not connected with faith in general, but with faith in Christ as its object. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

As faith is confidence in God's testimony, so saving faith is confidence in His particular testimony concerning Christ; and hence it is that it may be defined to be a reliance on Christ for salvation. "I know," says St Paul, "in whom I have believed," that is in whom I have trusted. This arises from the nature of the truth believed. The testimony which comes to us is that we are in a state of extreme danger, that we are condemned already, that we have the wrath of God abiding upon us, but that Christ has died to save us, that He has atoned for our sins, and that if we confide in Him we shall be saved. Now if this testimony be really understood and believed, we will entrust Christ with the care of our souls. The sinner who believes in Christ feels that without Christ he is in a state of extreme peril, that Christ is his only Saviour, and hence it is that he relies on Him by faith. I place my hope, says he, upon the great atonement of Christ; I have no

other plea to offer, but that Christ died for my sins, and that if I believe in Christ I shall be saved; on this I venture my soul, nay, this is all that I require, for I have here the word of God who cannot lie, I can point to His own promise, I listen to Christ's own invitation: "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out;" and guilty and condemned and perishing as I am in myself, I feel that I am justified in Him. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." It will be seen from what has been said that faith is eminently a rational act. Although above reason, yet it is in perfect harmony with it. Whenever the Bible is proved to be the Word of God and that such doctrines are contained in it, surely nothing is more reasonable than to believe these doctrines because their truth rests upon the authority of God. What proposition can be more self-evident than this: God hath said it, and therefore it is true. It may be that these doctrines are undiscoverable by reason, but if they be really a part of the divine testimony they must be true. Faith then is not the offspring of ignorance, but the child of light and knowledge. It is not opposed to reason, but it is its highest exercise, and reason itself asserts that it would be the most unreasonable thing in the universe not to believe the doctrines contained

in the revelation of the God of truth. To substitute reason for faith would be to substitute a candle for the noon-day sun to shut out the light of heaven which shines around us, and to walk in the sparks which we ourselves have kindled.

XXI

HEAVEN A STATE OF FRIENDSHIP

THERE are many views which may be taken of heaven on which the religious mind delights to dwell. We may regard it as a state of holiness, where we will be for ever free from sin, confirmed in love to God and Christ, and established in moral purity. Or we may view it as a state of knowledge, where we shall know even as also we are known, where our mental faculties shall be increased and our views of God's universe enlarged. Or we may delight to dwell upon it as that rest which remains for the people of God, where there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain. In this paper we would consider it as a state of friendship, as a union of hearts, as the eternal abode of love.

Heaven bears no resemblance to a nunnery or monastery where each worships God in silence and alone. It is an assembly of worshippers, the vast congregation of the redeemed. "Ye are come," says the apostle, "unto Mount Zion and to

the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant."

But we are not to conceive heaven to be such a social state as will exclude the idea of private friendship. It is indeed supposed by many that perfect and universal charity will swallow up all our private feelings — that friendship will lose itself in philanthropy—that our love for all the redeemed in glory will be so intense as not to admit of increase when directed toward a particular few—or, if there is any variation in the degrees of our love, that it will correspond to the different degrees of moral perfection in those to whom it is directed. But this is not the representation of Christianity, given us in Scripture. The duty of universal benevolence was never intended to exclude the peculiar love of friendship. The best Christians are remarkable for the warmth and steadiness of their attachment to their friends. And if this is the case on earth, why should it be otherwise in heaven? If there is nothing opposed to friendship in Christianity, if, on the contrary, it is encouraged and fostered in the Gospel, we may be certain

that there will be nothing opposed to it in heaven. But especially the Lord Jesus Christ, the living embodiment of Christianity, our great example, was susceptible of friendship. He loved the whole world, but He had His special friends. He was ready to die for thousands, but He preferred taking His private walks and sharing His joys and sorrows with Peter, James and John. And we can never attain to such a degree of perfection as to rise above that feeling which the Lord Jesus Himself displayed when on earth.

It is, we believe, the doctrine of Scripture that we shall recognise each other in a future state. This we may gather from many incidental statements in the Word of God. Moses and Elias were known to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Our Saviour speaks of sitting down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God. St Paul looks forward to the day of Christ with full expectation that he shall then meet his beloved converts, and rejoice in their fellowship and happiness. "We are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus." And again: "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy." And he comforts his converts under bereavement with the prospect of

a happy reunion in heaven. And besides these declarations of Scripture there are also several general considerations which go far to demonstrate our future mutual recognition. Our mental faculties, our memory, will not only remain but be improved. Our former earthly life will be vividly brought to our recollection, and the memories of our friends will be often awakened within us. And the loss sustained under bereavement would be greatly aggravated and the joys of heaven would be greatly lessened, and our gratification in its society diminished, were we not to meet with those whom we loved on earth and with whom we were connected by the tenderest ties. It is our union with them that increases our earthly happiness and rescues life from selfishness; and it will be our reunion with them that will heighten the bliss of heaven and increase those pleasures which are at God's right hand.

In heaven we shall meet with our friends in the Lord, whose intimacy and love we enjoyed on earth. If our memory is not lost and if in a future state we are still susceptible of friendship, then we may hope that we shall renew our acquaintance with our former friends. The recollection of our earthly intercourse will have the effect of uniting us more closely to them throughout eternity. Just as the friends of our childhood, those with whom we played in the days of youth, frequently continue

the friends of our manhood, though our views and feelings and tastes have all changed; so in like manner our friends on earth will remain our friends in heaven, notwithstanding whatever change may have passed over us and them. Heaven itself is not so much a change as a step in advance; we shall hereafter live the same life which we lived on earth purified from defect and fault. Our religious friendships shall not be destroyed, but rendered everlasting. Those who when on earth took sweet counsel together and walked to the house of God in company, will dwell for ever as companions in glory.

In heaven we shall meet with all those venerated characters whom we never knew on earth, but for whom for some reason we have contracted a sacred friendship, or to whom we have been indebted for the greatest blessings. We shall meet with those whose writings may have been the instrumental cause of our conversion or of our spiritual improvement; or which may have exercised a strong influence over our character and destiny. We shall meet with those whose biographies we have read with admiration, with whose feelings we sympathized, and whose characters we esteemed and loved. We shall meet with those whose great and heroic actions have called forth our unbounded admiration, with those holy martyrs who freely shed their blood for Christ, with those

intrepid reformers who by faith and living earnestness imparted new life to nations, with those zealous missionaries who sacrificed all that the world holds dear in order to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ to the heathen. We shall meet with those blessed saints whose names are recorded with approbation in Scripture, those servants of God and benefactors of men, whose characters we venerate, and whose footsteps we now follow at a distance; with Moses, the great law-giver of Israel, the most unselfish and the meekest of men, with David, more allied to us by human frailty, whose penitential psalms have been to us the source of comfort and hope, with Elijah the great Old Testament reformer, the grandeur of whose character has impressed upon him the stamp of majesty, with Isaiah, the living incarnation of one of those seraphs who surround the throne of God, with Peter, the erring, repenting, zealous, impulsive and loving apostle, with John, the excellence of whose character attracted the special love of the Saviour, and with Paul, who perhaps of all the children of men approached nearest perfection. In a word, we shall meet with the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets and the noble army of the martyrs; we shall be permitted to mingle with that goodly multitude who came out of great tribulation and washed their robes

and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

But, greatest and best of all, we shall meet in heaven with the Lord Jesus Christ. No small portion of the happiness of heaven will consist in the presence and fellowship of the glorified Redeemer. "Father," says our Lord Himself, "I will that they whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory." And it was to be with Christ, that Paul so earnestly desired to depart. "We know," says St John, "that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." And in the experience of many dying Christians, we find that it was the meeting with Christ in glory that comforted and supported them in the hour of dissolution; the thought not only of re-union with departed friends, but chiefly of seeing the Saviour, of being with Christ, was that which inspired them with comfort and enabled them to look forward to death without dismay. And what joy not only to behold this glorious and blessed Being but, with reverence be it spoken, to enjoy His friendship and to share His love. At present, we love Christ although we see Him not; how greatly shall our love be increased when we actually realize the Saviour, see Him as He is, feel His presence, and receive without the intervention of means the sensible proofs of His love.

But what a difference will there be between the friendship of earth and the friendship of heaven! How much will the latter excel the former! There are three drawbacks to earthly friendship which do not enter into the heavenly. Earthly friendship is at best imperfect. It is often cold and constrained; there is often a reserve, a want of openness in our acquaintances which repels the warmth of friendship. Oftener still we are made painfully aware of a want of congeniality of spirit. And there is also human selfishness; jealousy and opposing interests often destroy the apparently warmest friendship and convert it into indifference; imprudence and folly cool affection; and sin and vice separate the most intimate friends. But in heaven nothing of this kind shall ever enter; selfishness, jealousy and rivalship shall be unknown; perfect love will animate every breast; and nothing will disturb the friendship of the redeemed. Earthly friendship is also limited. It is necessarily limited not only to those who live in the same age and country but even to a small portion of them. There are many who are well fitted to be our friends, whose spirits are most in unison with our own, whose tastes and feelings are the same, but whom we may never have known; or if we have come in contact with them, yet we may have met them only once or twice. Distance often separates us from our dearest friends and

prevents the interchange of feeling. Our want of command of time and leisure to cultivate friendship imposes a limit to its extent. But in heaven we will meet with every variety of sanctified disposition; distance will prove no hindrance to reciprocal affection, and eternity will afford ample leisure for the enjoyments of friendship. Earthly friendship is temporary. Very often it comes to an end even in this world; coldness and indifference often take the place of intimacy; distance frequently causes men to forget the friends of former years; and new friends and acquaintances often supplant the old. When friendship is so strong as to stand all these tests, it at length must suffer the anguish of violent separation. The dearest friends must part and the strongest earthly ties must be snapped asunder. It is the dissolution of friendship, the separation from those we loved so well which invests bereavement with such unspeakable sadness, and throws over the world a covering of sackcloth. But in heaven death-divided friends shall meet to part no more; there shall then be no separations, no bereavements to lament; God shall confer on friendship that element which is wanted to crown it with perfection—the element of immortality.

XXII

ANGELS EXAMINING THE SCHEME OF SALVATION

THAT there are in the universe many intelligences different from and superior to the human race, reason and the analogy of nature teach us is probable. This world, however vast it may seem in our eyes, is in reality but an atom among the works of the Most High. Astronomy teaches us that myriads upon myriads of worlds exist many thousand times larger than our earth, and that if we were transported to one of them, this globe would be unseen by reason of its smallness, and consequently its extinction would be by us unheeded and unnoticed. When we consider how this world is peopled with creatures innumerable, is it reasonable to suppose that those systems of worlds, immensely superior in magnitude to that to which we belong, were created for nothing — that they are immense solitudes uninhabited and ungladdened by any order of creatures? And if this cannot be conceived without reflecting on the wisdom and

goodness of the Creator, is it not highly probable that in some of them there will be found orders of intelligence superior to man? And this probability is increased when we reflect on the vast number of creatures below us in the scale of being. If these are so numerous, it is agreeable to analogy to suppose that the number is not less great of those which are above us; as it is certain that we are not the meanest, so it is probable that neither are we the most exalted among the creatures of God. What reason and the analogy of nature teach us as probable, revelation informs us is certain. There are, we are told, angels who excel in strength, thrones, and principalities and powers in heaven.

It is doubtless the chief employment of angels and other pure intelligences to examine into the works of God, and learn from them the divine perfections. They are continually engaged in contemplating the manifestations of divine power, wisdom, and goodness as seen in the works of creation, and the displays of divine justice, holiness and truth as seen in God's moral government over the universe. They are always discovering fresh materials for love, admiration, and praise; new and brighter and more glorious manifestations of the perfections of the Godhead. Their minds are unwearied and unimpaired; their moral nature is eagerly alive to the pursuit of truth; and all time

is given them for the investigation of the works of God.

But especially must their attention be fixed on the great work of redemption. Here more of God is seen than in any of His other works, and consequently this will occupy a proportionable part of the time, labour, and study of the angels. "The glory of God is seen in the face of Christ." All the divine perfections which are elsewhere found separately, are here blended together, and shine forth with united eternal splendour. "God," says St Paul, "created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church, the manifold wisdom of God."

It is impossible for us to tell all the reasons why this great work so engrosses the attention and engages the contemplation of the angels. There are mysteries in it which our feeble faculties cannot fathom; there are secrets connected with it which are concealed from the knowledge of all living; there are discoveries and reasons and manifestations of divine glory, and purposes effected by it, and moral beauty flowing from it which only angelic minds can comprehend; there are connections between the work of redemption and other orders of being in the universe which are not revealed to us; there are prospects of glory and grandeur which our mental vision cannot

reach. But angels know more than we; their faculties are more vigorous, their powers are greater, their mental vision is more acute, and to them are revealed data which are concealed from us.

I. Angels examine into the scheme of salvation, because it presents to them an object of surpassing wonder and greatness. Objects of wonder and grandeur engage the attention and exercise the faculties of intelligent beings. Thus it is that we love to dwell upon the grand and marvellous in nature—upon the vastness of the universe, the glories of the heavenly bodies, the æons of geology, and the discoveries of the various sciences. But what object is comparable in point of greatness and wonder to the incarnation and death of the Son of God. "Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh," and this mystery, the apostle tells us, is seen of angels. That God should humble Himself, that He should take upon Himself human nature, that the Word should become incarnate, that that Word incarnate should suffer and die on a cross of agony—this is a subject which confounds human reason, and which must inspire the angels with amazement and awe. The glories of the heavens, the creation of suns and systems, the stupendous changes in the universe are not to be equalled to this. This is the sun in a system of marvels, the brightest,

the most glorious and the most wonderful display of the manifold wisdom of God, the wonder of the universe, the chief of the ways of the Most High.

II. Angels examine into the scheme of salvation because they see in it a new manifestation of the perfections of God. The wisdom, the power, and the goodness of God are distinctly inscribed on the works of creation; His holiness is impressed upon the law which regulates the conduct of His moral creatures; and He has displayed His justice in taking vengeance on the breakers of His law, in sparing not the angels that sinned. But if it were not for the death of Christ, so far as we know, there would have been no display of the glorious attribute of mercy, no manifestation of compassion to the sinful and the guilty. With lowly reverence do the angels examine into the great mystery of Christ crucified; they discern a new manifestation of the character of God; they see here the wonderful union of infinite justice and infinite mercy—that God may be just and yet the justifier of the sinful and the ungodly, the just God and yet the Saviour, the moral Ruler of the universe and yet the merciful Father.

III. Angels examine into the scheme of salvation, because they see here an instance of unparalleled love. Angels are benevolent beings;

they themselves are continually engaged in offices of mercy and compassion; they are employed in missions of love to this earth; they rejoice at the repentance of a sinner; and are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Hence it is that they delight in the contemplation of works of benevolence. But what work of benevolence, what generous and self-denying action can be compared with the love of Christ as displayed in our salvation? Here there is an adequate theme for the study and wonder and admiration of the angels. They see in the fact of the Son of God taking upon Himself our nature, clothing Himself with humanity, veiling His Godhead for a season, a proof of matchless love. And what awful sufferings did He endure in order to save us! He hid not His face from shame and spitting; He endured insults the most opprobrious, and sufferings the most excruciating; He encountered the wrath of God during His mysterious agony in the garden, and in that awful hour of abandonment on the cross when He exclaimed, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" And for whom was it that the Son of God submitted to such humiliation, and endured such sufferings? It was for sinners—for beings who to the angels must appear remarkable only for their insignificance in the scale of creation and for the turpitude of their moral character.

IV. Angels examine into the scheme of salvation, because they see here God's victory over the powers of evil. The origin of moral evil, the entrance of sin and misery into the universe, is a problem which has for ages baffled the understanding of the wisest of mankind from the very dawn of reason, and which may justly be considered as inexplicable. Whether angels understand this mystery we do not know, but it must be an object of interest to them, and therefore everything that would curb or destroy the powers of evil must be the object of their attention and study. Now it is especially in the great work of redemption that God's victory over the powers of evil is beheld. Christ, we are told, has caused Satan to fall like lightning from heaven. He has crushed the serpent's head, and "through death has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil." And when we reflect that angels are not mere spectators in this victory over the powers of evil, but that they themselves are actively engaged in this grand spiritual warfare —that as the armies in heaven they follow in the train of the victorious Word of God—that God's victory is also their victory—we cannot fail to perceive that the death of Christ, by which this victory was secured and rendered certain, must be to them the object of rapture and adoration.

V. Angels examine into the scheme of salva-

tion, because they perceive it to be the source of boundless happiness. We cannot possibly know all the glorious effects which flow from the death of Christ. We cannot tell whether or not the angels themselves are directly concerned in it. We cannot say whether or not the benefits of the death of Christ extend to other worlds—whether this earth only was the mere theatre of the great victory of God over the powers of evil—insignificant in itself and famous only as being the battlefield where the destinies of countless worlds were decided—the Waterloo of the universe. These things are mysteries concealed from our knowledge; we may conjecture, but we can arrive at no certainty; we have no data wherewith to decide. But angels know them; the information withheld from us is communicated to them. But still to the human race the death of Christ is the source of boundless happiness. Who can tell the immense accession of happiness in the salvation of a single human soul? Eternity is a period which we cannot comprehend, and yet an eternity of happiness is procured for that soul through the death of Christ. But doubtless there are thousands and tens of thousands of redeemed ones—there is the great white-robed multitude who surround the throne—the vast congregation of the redeemed —a multitude which no man can number of all

nations and kindreds and people and tongues—and when the number of the elect is completed, when the church of the redeemed shall be presented faultless and blameless before God—what an accession of happiness shall there be in the universe at large — how shall the angels who shouted together at man's creation and ushered in the advent of the Saviour with hosannahs of praise exult with joy over the triumph of Christ and His people—the redemption of His mystical body—and what songs of praise shall usher in that new era of eternity—when the mystery of God is completed—the jubilee of the redeemed and ransomed universe.

XXIII

CHRISTIANITY A RELIGION OF LOVE

IT is agreed on all hands that Jesus Christ and the sacred writers taught a system of morality surpassing those of the most renowned philosophers of Greece, far superior to the Ethics of Aristotle or the Republic of Plato. It is true that attempts have been made to diminish the force of this admission by collections of moral precepts taken from heathen and Jewish sources, similar to those inculcated by Jesus, and the assertion has been made that there is nothing original in our Lord's moral teaching. But even if this could be made out, it would only prove that Jesus Christ, though uneducated in any philosophical school, equalled in wisdom all the ancient philosophers put together; that the rays of light scattered throughout their writings met as in a focus in His teaching. And further, the morality of the Gospel is not merely distinguished by its pre-eminence but also chiefly by the authority with which its precepts are enforced, and by the motives which it held

forth for their performance; whereas the morality of the heathen at its best was a mere system of advice or prudential maxims, but urged without the sanction of a higher authority, and enforced without any motives either of reward for obedience or of punishment for disobedience. But over and above all this, Jesus Christ not merely delivered a superior system of moral duties enforced by divine authority and by motives the most tremendous, but He imparted both the power and the inclination to obey; He supported the weakness of frail humanity and implanted in the hearts of His people the spirit of obedience; that support and that spirit of obedience is love. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." "Christianity," says Schiller, "is the moral law transfigured by love."

Christianity is not a religion of the intellect; not a system of doctrines concerning which all that is required is that we should understand them and assent to their truth, like some system of philosophy which is to be mastered by careful study. Religious knowledge is certainly highly valuable. We must know the truth, before we can believe it, or before it can rightly influence our conduct. Truth in religion ought to be the object of our pursuit; without it religion degenerates into superstition. But mere knowledge, apart from love, is not religion. It is like a marble statue; we may admire its form and proportions; we may be

captivated with its gracefulness and symmetry, but there is in it no breath of life; it is a piece of dead matter after all. A man may be a profound theologian; he may have mastered the original languages; he may be able to trace the connection between the different doctrines of Scripture; he may be powerful in the refutation of objections and in the solution of doubts; he may be justly reverenced for his vast acquirements; but his religious knowledge may be a mere speculation, without any direct practical application, without edification either to himself or to others. Mere intellect cannot penetrate into the deep things of religion; it cannot fully estimate the evil of sin on the one hand, or the love of Christ on the other; these and other spiritual matters can only be mastered by experience. Knowledge must be animated by love before we can understand the things of the Spirit of God. The sublimest truths of religion are discernible not by the intellect but by the heart.

Christianity is not a religion of ceremonialism, the performance of certain religious rites, the repetition of a certain liturgy, the observance of certain sacraments. Ceremonialism, properly used, is not useless but highly beneficial. It imparts a steadiness to our religion; it diffuses a spirit of order and decorum into our worship, and it guarantees the fulfilment of our religious services.

Stated days for public devotion, a stated form of worship, stated times for private prayers, and stated portions of the Holy Scriptures to be read, are helpful to devotion, and without a certain measure of ceremonialism our religious exercises would degenerate into a series of impulsive efforts or be entirely neglected. But ceremonialism to be beneficial must be animated with spiritual life; it must be conjoined with love and so transfigured, otherwise our prayers, our readings, our public worship, our sacraments, however decorously performed, will become mere mechanical services—the utterance of certain sentiments and the performance of certain actions, whilst the worship of the heart, the only worship which is acceptable to God, is absent. Ceremonialism, without love, is like a mere puppet, highly artistic it may be in its construction, which being pulled with certain wires and strings is made to imitate the actions of a living man—to walk, to handle, to open its eyes, to speak; a contrivance at once beautiful and ingenious; but the life is awanting; it is a puppet, a mere mechanical contrivance after all.

Christianity is not a religion of mere outward moralities, the maintenance of an honourable and virtuous and respectable character in the world. Morality is of higher value than religious knowledge and ceremonialism. Nor is a strictly honest man so common in this age of fraud and imposi-

tion. Indeed without morality there can be no religion; heaven's gates are for ever barred against the impure and the unjust. But, inestimable though morality is, Christianity is something more. A man may have a blameless character in the world, and be justly esteemed and respected for his rectitude, and yet not be a religious man. Christianity is something more deeply internal; a spirit which infuses itself into moral virtues and converts them into Christian graces; a divine love which warms the cold morality of the world, and converts its proprieties into generous impulses and unselfish actions. Morality without love is like the body without the spirit, it is dead.

Christianity is a religion of love. This is that living spirit which transforms knowledge into experience, ceremonialism into true worship, and morality into holiness. Love to God is at once the fulfilment of the law and the spirit of the Gospel. And this love to God is chiefly manifested when directed toward the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. God Himself in His own absolute existence is too remote and abstract for our comprehension; and therefore to become the object of our love, He must become incarnate; He has clothed Himself with human feelings, and thus has humbled Himself to our infirmities. Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of God; the brightness of the Father's glory, and the

express image of His Person, and therefore the object of our worship and love. Thus then Jesus Christ as God claims our supreme love; we must devote to Him the warmest affections of our souls; we must love Him with our whole moral nature, better than the world, better than our dearest friends, better than life itself; and thousands upon thousands have thus supremely loved Jesus Christ and have thus obeyed the first great commandment of the law.

Our Lord having announced the first commandment of the law, proceeds to say, "and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Love to God and love to man must ever be combined and go hand in hand. Love to man is founded on and arises from love to God; the love of Christ constrains us to love that race for whom He died. Love to man is the "royal law"—that which is the king of all laws—which is not only exalted above them as a prince among his fellows, but rules over them and converts them into its ministering servants, so that all other virtues obey the commands of love. This is that "law of liberty" of which St James speaks, the moral law of restraints and obligations transformed into our natural disposition and character.

Love is the life of the heart. Man has a threefold nature and a threefold life. There is one life of the body, another of the mind, and another of

the heart. The life of the body is seen in the actions of our bodily members and the functions of our bodily organs. The life of the mind is thought, the exercise of our intellectual powers, the acquirement of knowledge, reflection and reason. But the life of the heart is love, the exercise of the affections, the outgoings of the soul toward others. Apart from love, there is nothing but stagnation, sterility and death.

Every man's life is shaped by his love. If it is an earthly love, it will tinge all his actions; if he loves riches, his character will be mercenary; if he loves honours, he will be ambitious; if he loves pleasures, he will be voluptuous; if he loves ease, he will be indolent; if he loves himself, he will be selfish; if he loves his fellow-men he will be benevolent. In short, "Love is to a man's character what the magnetic force is to the needle, the power that adjusts all his aims and works and practically determines the man." Or rather we might say love is the disposition of the soul, the character itself; for according to the object to which love is directed, so is the disposition; and thus change the object of love and you effect a general revolution of the man, you change his disposition, you make him an entirely different character, a new creation. Hence then he whose love is changed, who instead of loving the world or the things of the world has his affections

directed toward God, is born of God; everyone who has the divine love established in him has experienced the great change which we term regeneration or the new birth; "love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God."

XXIV

IMMORTALITY THE CHARACTERISTIC AND RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN

LET us consider immortality as the characteristic of man. Many natural and moral arguments, altogether independent of revelation, have been adduced in proof of the immortality of man. It has, for example, been asserted that the soul of man is immaterial; its properties are wholly different from those of matter; reason, affection, and will are different from extension, weight, and impenetrability; and from this it is argued that the soul is incapable of dissolution—that death is merely the separation of soul and body—that the consequences of death are the dissolution of the body, but that these consequences cannot in the slightest degree affect the soul. It has been further argued that man cannot possibly in this life attain to the perfection of his intellectual and moral nature; that he has mental and spiritual desires without any corresponding objects; that apart from immortality he is an enigma, a creature

in a wrong position. It has been asserted, that the justice of God requires that there should be a future state of rewards and punishments; that here vast disorders prevail in the moral world; that here there is no marked distinction between the righteous and the wicked; that all things apparently happen alike to all; and that therefore there must be a future state when God will render to every man according to his works. It has been argued that the suggestions of conscience confirm the doctrine of immortality; that in every man there is a moral sense of good and evil; that remorse arises from the commission of sin; and that we are warned of a coming retribution. There is much force in these and similar arguments; they go far to prove the immortality of the soul on merely natural grounds. But supposing that they do not; supposing an infidel could demonstrate that the soul is material and therefore mortal with the body; that the imperfection of this life is no reason that there should be another, because God never designed man to be perfect; that the argument from the justice of God is merely an appeal to our ignorance; that nothing can be built on the declarations of conscience; in short, that as an eminent naturalist of the present day affirms, the arguments of philosophy in favour of the immortality of the soul apply equally to the permanence of life in

other beings; supposing all this proved, yet what of that if it can be shown that God will employ His power to preserve our souls in an eternal existence. Immortality is a doctrine of revelation, and therefore it must be admitted by all believers in that revelation, that man is immortal, if not by nature, yet in virtue of the supreme power of God.

Hence it is that we rest the doctrine of immortality chiefly, if not entirely, on the Word of God. The arguments drawn from natural light and reason are subtle, some of them not easily understood, and perhaps many of them liable to objections. But the declarations of Scripture on this subject are clear, decisive, indubitable. "Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." The idea of a future life lies at the foundation of His religion; deny it, and you deny Christianity. This is self-evident. If there be no future state, our hopes and our faith are alike vain. To every believer in Christ then immortality is completely demonstrated,—that there is a future life beyond the grave; be that life what it may; be it the life of disembodied spirits before the resurrection, or be it the resurrection-life, the life of the whole man; all that is affirmed is that man is formed for immortality, that death is not extinction nor annihilation; that in another world, man must live, and live for ever.

Man is created a religious being. This makes the enormous difference between him and the lower animals. He is capable of recognising the Author of his being. There are feelings and capacities and powers within him which constitute him the appropriate subject of moral government. It is true that man has fallen; that his religious nature is perverted; but it is not destroyed, otherwise he would cease to be man, he would cease to be an accountable creature. Man is capable of knowing, obeying and enjoying God. The true Christian, the man who lives to Jesus Christ, who has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, who knows what it is to be reconciled unto God, who feels that God is his Father and that he is His child, is the highest type of man, a being resembling the angels of God.

But man, by being a religious being, is also an immortal being. He has already within him a principle of immortality. It is not precisely correct to say that man is formed for immortality, that after death he enters upon eternity; man is already living in eternity; he has entered upon an existence which shall never terminate. Immortality is not something future, but present; eternity is begun. The moment we drew our first breath, from that moment our eternity commenced. Man in reality can never die, that is to say, cease to live. We are apt to look upon death as the end

of life. It is not so. The end of an earthly life, indeed it is, but not of life; man shall never cease to live. Death is not extinction; it is separation, it is the dissolution of the body, it is departure; but extinction, it is not; it is not ceasing to live, it is merely a change of life. It is a solemn and appalling consideration, that we cannot divest ourselves of that awful mysterious principle of life; we are like those mentioned in the Apocalypse who although they seek death yet cannot find it; we cannot extinguish our being.

The importance of immortality consists not only in its being life without termination—life ceaseless, unending. That is indeed a solemn consideration. Think on it: a being endowed with endless life—with a mind which shall never cease to think—with affections which shall never cease to be exercised; and this our state, these souls, our very selves, immortal. But it is the retribution with which immortality is connected that invests it with infinite importance. That world, to which we are so fast hastening, is a state of rewards and punishments. Here we are upon our trial; here we are doing those actions, and acquiring those habits which will be for ever inseparably connected with us. Here we are sowing for eternity. In the next life we shall be rewarded with the smiles of the divine approba-

tion, or punished with the frowns of the divine displeasure.

Surely then the possession of immortality is an awful responsibility. Think of the value of the soul connected with immortality. Think on the import of our Lord's words, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Who does not see and feel the truth and force of these words—that though we possessed the whole world and all its riches and all its pleasures and all its honours, we would be losers if for this we bartered the soul. Ages shall roll on and yet our souls, that is, we ourselves will still exist. There is no such thing as the soul being swallowed up in the Deity; our personality will be preserved for ever; each one will have to confess I exist—I and not another. This is such an awful consideration, that many a one would gladly part with immortality if he could; gladly renounce it if he could; gladly consent to be annihilated if he could; wish himself to be on the same level with the lower animals as to the duration of life, rather than incur such a fearful responsibility.

And in order the more fully to see the value of the soul, think on the price paid for its redemption. The redemption of the soul was precious; the price paid for it was the blood of God's own Son. Go to Calvary, and there learn the value of an im-

mortal soul. See the Son of God in human nature hanging upon the cross, exalted as a criminal between heaven and earth. Behold Him suffering the most excruciating agonies, exposed to the taunts of men and devils, bleeding, agonising, dying. And now judge how precious must have been those souls in the sight of God, when He redeemed them at a price so immense. Judge how great must have been the misery to which they were exposed, when to rescue them God spared not His own Son. That the Son of God, the Lord of unnumbered universes, the King of Angels, should take upon Himself human nature and die for men upon the cross is a mystery which proves that human souls are of priceless value, for what in the universe is of equal value with the blood of the Son of God?

The most awful truths seem to have lost the influence which they ought to have upon us, either by reason of their being familiar, or else more probably by reason of our dulness and stupidity. There is not a more awful truth with reference to ourselves and to our race than immortality, especially when taken in connection with retribution. Just think soberly and seriously upon it; fix the eye of the mind steadily on it; think on the awfulness of the attribute of immortality—a life without end—an endless career of existence, feeling, enjoying, or else suffering. And then think that this

shall be our destiny; think that this is already our destiny, that eternity is begun. 'I live now, and I shall live for ever. I can never cease to be. Yonder sun may be extinguished. This world may be extinguished, but I can never be extinguished.' If we truly realise this, we would be startled, as if by an earthquake, out of our religious indifference.

How great is this privilege and prerogative of immortality to the righteous. Their souls are saved. Theirs is an eternity of life in the truest and fullest sense of the term; it is indeed, as the Scriptures term it, "eternal life." A saved soul, a soul rescued from hell and misery and guilt and sin, a soul brought back to God and holiness and truth, a soul entering upon a career of endless progress in virtue and happiness and knowledge, a soul restored to and for ever established in righteousness. And then no end to this blessedness. Ages roll on, and yet always the enjoyment of God, new pleasures, new acquirements, new capacities, new attainments. The future, one bright, unfading prospect of infinite and endless enjoyment.

But, on the other hand, how terrible must this prerogative of immortality be to the wicked and impenitent. Theirs is a fearful eternity — the second death, death with all its horrors, without any of its repose. Think on the calamity of a lost

soul. It is dreadful and painful to write about it; what must it be to experience it? The soul is not lost in the sense of ceasing to be; we cannot be deprived of this part of ourselves; we cannot in this sense lose the soul. The loss of the soul is the soul cut off from God, severed from His grace, separated from Him who is the only true life of man.

How awful then is this immortality; at once the dignity and the responsibility of man; either the greatest blessing or the greatest curse that can be bestowed on us. Our destinies are tremendous; we cannot in this life realise them in any adequate sense. Existence in the truest and highest sense may yet be a blessing. Come to Christ, as Peter did when he felt himself sinking in the water, and when there was nothing between him and inevitable death but Christ; come, as he then did, crying, "Lord, save me, I perish." And let those who have already come, out of gratitude and love to Him who died for them, live active, true, Christian lives, so that when they come to die, they may be enabled to entertain the humble hope of a blessed immortality.

XXV

CHRISTIAN COURAGE

COURAGE is a Christian virtue. Christianity is a power. It does not enervate or weaken, but braces man's moral nature. It does not leave man a weak, helpless being, a prey to every temptation, changeable as the wind, inconstant and unstable as water; it strengthens what is weak; it makes him courageous, undaunted, and in a great measure unassailable by temptation.

But here let us distinguish between two kinds of courage, active and passive. There is an active courage; that which actuates the warrior in the battlefield and the statesman in the senate; a courage which is often the accompaniment of great minds, which welcomes dangers, resents injuries, and turns its back upon no foe. And there is a passive courage; a courage seen rather in endurance than in action; which patiently suffers afflictions, forgives injuries, exercises forbearance, commands and rules the temper, yields not to temptation, and is ready when called upon to suffer for the sake of religion. Now it is not

the former but the latter, not the active but the passive, not that which actuates the warrior in the battlefield, but that which actuates the Christian in his sufferings that is true Christian courage.

Christian courage is seen in the endurance of suffering. Courage is displayed when a man submits to afflictions without murmuring, and resigns himself unreservedly into the hands of God; and still more illustriously when a man under affliction manfully performs his duties, triumphs in spirit over bodily pain, does not succumb under affliction, but in spite of disease goes about his duties. And when sufferings arise from religion; when, as in the days of the apostles, believers were exposed to cruel sufferings for the sake of Christ—to scourgings and tortures; courage was seen in not shrinking from these sufferings, in submitting to them rather than deny their Lord, or do anything contrary to conscience. And in the case of martyrdom Christians have displayed an inflexible moral courage; weak and delicate women have met death in its cruellest forms without flinching, encountered wild beasts in the amphitheatres, or given their bodies to be burned not accepting the deliverance offered to them on condition that they renounced their religion; thus exhibiting a courage which throws the bravery of the renowned heroes of the world completely in the shade.

Christian courage is seen in the resistance of temptation. There are many who fall from want of courage; they permit themselves to be laughed out of their religion; they give way to the pressing importunities of friends; they yield to the taunts of companions, because they have not the courage to say the little word *no*. They are afraid to be regarded as cowards, if they do not join with others in evil; whereas it is cowardice that is the cause of their compliance. True courage is seen not in yielding, but in resisting; in boldly meeting taunts and jeers, and in overcoming them; in stedfastly persevering to do what is right; in saying 'I am not afraid of difficulties, of dangers, of such and such consequences; but I am afraid of offending my God; I am afraid of ingratitude, baseness and moral degradation; I am afraid to stain my conscience with sin, to do what is wrong, to bring dishonour on the cause of Christ, to give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme. God forbid, whatever may be the consequences, that I should sin against God.' This principle, that God must in all cases and at all hazards be obeyed, is the great principle of true Christian courage.

Christian courage is seen in the hatred of evil. In this age of false liberality this is a feature of Christian courage which is much overlooked. We are accustomed to regard the Gospel as wholly a

religion of love; to dwell entirely on the merciful character of God; to conceive of Him as if He were too tender to punish, as if His forbearance were unlimited. It is true that the Gospel is a religion of love, but it is the property of love to hate evil. It is true that God is a God of infinite mercy, but the mercy of God causes Him for the sake of others to root out and to extirpate the obstinately impenitent. It is a false mercy which knows not when to strike. We see this hatred of evil in the Old Testament saints. There evil was personified; not only vices but vicious men were hated. Christianity is a purer religion than that of the Old Testament; it has taught us to distinguish between impiety and the persons of the impious; but we should have the same bitter and undivided and implacable hatred to evil which the Old Testament saints had to evil persons; and this hatred should cause us to look upon the wicked not only with disapprobation, but with indignation. With what bitter words does the Saviour Himself, He who is the incarnation of love, attack the Pharisees—how does He scathe them with the fire of His indignation. We should then have an intense hatred against evil; against that backbiting which damages our neighbour's character; against that slander which propagates lies and falsehoods; against that avarice which grinds the poor; against that intemperance which pollutes

the soul; against that Pharisaism which makes a cloak of religion. In this effeminate age, we want that moral courage which is seen in the hatred of evil.

Christian courage is seen in the performance of duty. Whatever duties are laid upon us, however numerous and difficult and distasteful, Christian courage will cause us resolutely to set about their performance, to persevere in them and not to give up until they are accomplished; and so also in the humble duties of life, those which are obscure and mean in the eyes of the world though not of God, Christian courage will be seen in their faithful performance and in contentment with obscurity. And in disappointments, those bitter trials which cloud the sunshine of life, those discouragements which embitter existence, Christian courage is seen, not in hardening ourselves against them, not in stoically refusing to feel them; but in submitting to them however keenly felt, in resisting the temptation arising from them to give up the struggle, and in manfully performing our duties in spite of them. There is no harder trial in life than disappointment, and none where Christian courage is more necessary.

Instances of want of courage are numerous. We confine ourselves to those given in Scripture. For want of moral courage, Pilate condemned Christ. He saw his duty; he knew perfectly well

the innocence of Christ; he could not stifle or conceal his knowledge of it; accustomed as he was to rapine and bloodshed, he looks upon the crime of condemning Christ with fear and horror. But he has not courage to perform his duty; his interests are at stake; the Jews threatened to accuse him to Cæsar; if he releases Christ his political hopes may be blasted; he is not brave enough to risk this; he yields, he tampers with his conscience, he falls. So also was it with King Agrippa, when Paul came home to his conscience with the inquiry, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?" He is convinced that Paul is in the right, and that Christianity is true, but he has not courage to declare himself a Christian, to acknowledge before Festus, the representative of Cæsar and the great men of Cæsarea, that he is a convert to the man who stood before them as a prisoner in chains; his courage fails him, and therefore he evades the inquiry with these words, half in earnest and half in irony, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." The apostle Peter wanted in some measure this element of moral courage. He was indeed brave; he rushed against the armed band that came to arrest his Master; but his courage was rather active than passive. It was no want of faith in Christ, and no want of love to Christ,—in these graces Peter was inferior to none of the apostles,—but it was a

want of moral courage that caused him to deny his Lord. On the other hand, Paul possessed this virtue in a very high degree; he was endowed with the qualities of a strong and great mind. On all occasions and in all its departments, his courage was conspicuous. Is courage seen in the endurance of sufferings? Paul gloried in tribulation, took pleasure in persecution, and rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus. Is courage seen in the resistance to temptation? When on his way to Jerusalem with the sure prospect of bonds and imprisonments, and when his friends with tears besought him to spare himself, and not to venture; with what heroic words does he resist the temptation; "Bonds and imprisonments do not move me, for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Is courage seen in the hatred of evil? With what brave words and what holy indignation does Paul attack evil in the person of his judge; "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall, for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law." Is courage seen in the performance of duty? What undaunted courage did Paul display in preaching the Gospel, in spite of persecutions, difficulties, perils, thorns in the flesh, messengers of Satan, wild beasts at Ephesus? It is a proverb that every

man has his price; but we cannot conceive what amount of temptation would be necessary to cause Paul to do an action which he knew to be sinful and wrong.

But there is a greater than Paul; One whose moral courage was purer, loftier, sublimer, freer from passion than that of the great apostle. Jesus Christ is the living embodiment of moral courage. With what moral courage did He go up to Jerusalem, perfectly aware that the cross awaited Him; a courage which struck His disciples with amazement and terror! And when He stood before Pilate, clothed in the majesty of innocence, bearing witness to the truth, replying not to the taunts of his enemies, what fortitude did He display! On the cross the same spirit was exhibited; the most terrible sufferings were endured without a murmur, self was sacrificed, and the world was redeemed. Verily this was the true King of men, the Hero of heroes, the union of glory and courage. "Through the knowledge of Him that hath called us by His own glory and virtue" (or courage).

Without moral courage Christians are weak; they want energy and strength of character; they are liable to all those sins in which lies the element of weakness; they are apt to be led away by feeling rather than to be actuated by principle; and thus they do not command that respect to which their

excellencies would otherwise entitle them. Without moral courage Christians are inconsistent. If they have not sufficient strength of mind to resist temptation, they will often be overcome and commit those actions which are contrary to the Christian spirit. Thus their character and conduct will be unsteady; at one time they will act as Christians, but not at another; at one time they will be fervent, zealous, active, at another time they will be worldly, formal, unchristian. Without moral courage Christians are undecided. It is courage which imparts decision of character to a man, a firmness of purpose, a steadiness of action. But if this is wanting, man is wavering in his purposes, a continual prey to temptation, the sport of divers and casual impulses. His indecision mars his religion and unfits him for ever being an eminent Christian. Without moral courage Christians are unfruitful. What good they do is done by fits and starts; they cannot persevere amid difficulties and disappointments in a steady course of Christian activity. Like the barren fig tree there may be an abundance of leaves, but the fruit is wanting; there may be much profession of Christianity, but perhaps the reality itself, the Christianity, is wanting.

But there is a caution which must be given. Christian courage is an indispensable addition to faith, but let us see that we have faith. Christian

courage without faith can have no existence; or if something similar to it can exist, it is the mere product of this earth, call it by what name you please. We must first come to Christ; and then add to our faith the graces of the Christian character. Courage must follow, not precede, faith. "Add to your faith courage." Let us be brave Christians, undaunted by the fear of man, strong against temptation, resolutely opposed to all that is evil, unstained by the frauds and artifices of the world, doing our duty manfully, without expecting any reward except that which comes from the approval of our own conscience and of our God. Let us show our courage by our hatred to evil. Let us hate it with a perfect hatred in ourselves and in others. We need some of the Old Testament spirit within us to attack evil and wrong, to invade the kingdom of darkness. We need the courage of the martyrs when they laid down their lives in the defence of God and truth. We need the boldness of Jesus Christ when He attacked the Pharisees. How loath are we to censure men for their sins! How do we excuse ourselves from the performance of this duty! How weak and helpless are we when we ought to be stern and indignant!

XXVI

RELIGIOUS DESPONDENCY

EVERY man has his seasons of despondency, when the heart sinks within him and hope, the last refuge of the miserable, is almost gone, when sadness settles itself on the present, and the future is gloomy and foreboding, and when life seems to be utterly miserable and insupportable. Such a feeling may arise from many causes, from the crushing weight of some bitter disappointment, from ineffectual efforts which result only in failure, from the discovery that we are the prey of some lingering, painful and hopeless malady, from the felt decay of our mental powers, from the death of some beloved relative in whom our happiness was centred, from the commission of some sin, or from religious distress. The soul is then thrown back upon itself, and made painfully sensible of its own wretchedness. Everything is seen through a distorted medium; the sorrow of the mind is projected on what is outward; we look upon things with jaundiced eyes; even the fair scenes of nature are divested of their beauty; God Him-

self, the Father of mercies, is regarded as an object of terror and not of trust, confidence and love; and we are led to wish that we had never existed, and like Job to curse the day of our birth. In such a state as this we are tempted to give up the struggle, and either to sink into hopeless despondency or to lose self-respect and to become utterly careless and indifferent. We feel ourselves conquered, our efforts baffled, our expectations disappointed, our aspirations defeated, and our hopes blasted.

In this paper we would restrict ourselves to despondency arising from religion.

Despondency arising from the fear of coming short of heaven is a very common cause of religious dejection. We fear that we shall never get to heaven; either that we were never really converted, or that we will fall from the faith. We have tried and struggled after an assured confidence, but have failed. Our faith is feeble, and the world still exerts a mighty influence over us. We fear that we shall never see the King in His beauty, nor behold the land that is very far off.

This despondency may arise from entertaining false views of God. Some religious persons are apt to view God as an antagonist rather than as a Father. They feel that He is incensed against them because of their iniquity, and refuses to be reconciled; as if He were like one of the gods

of the heathen—a God of terror and not of mercy. We need not say that these are false views of God, most dishonourable to His glory. Whilst we attend to His justice, we must not forget His love. This is inscribed on all the works of His hands; "the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord." It has been displayed to us in particular in His Providence; and when we meditate on our past life, we will discern many evidences of His kindness; His fatherly care has watched over us from our youth upward even until now. And surely His past goodness is a reason why we should trust Him in the future. But, above all things, He has manifested His infinite love in the gift of His Son; He has proved His desire for our salvation in sparing not His own Son, but delivering Him up for us all. He wishes not the destruction of any of His creatures, but seeks their repentance and salvation. "He will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Let us realise the fatherly love of God; and believe that He is willing to be gracious, ready to be reconciled, and willing to save.

Another cause of this despondency may be wrong views of the way of salvation. We may be seeking to make ourselves righteous—aiming at personal holiness to recommend us to the favour of God. And hence it is not to be wondered at that we should always feel ourselves disappointed

and disheartened. The invitations of the Gospel are free and unrestricted. "Him that cometh unto Me," saith our Lord, "I will in no wise cast out." We are not to wait until we are more holy before we come to Christ, but we are to come in order that we may be made holy. Holiness is not the cause of our acceptance with God, but the effect. We are to come to Christ just as we are, as sinners, without any other plea than that Christ died for us and invites us to come to Him. If we wait until we are more righteous we will be certain to become a prey to religious despondency, because we can never be sure that we have that amount of righteousness which is sufficient to recommend us to God.

There is also another very common mistake in the way of salvation, and which gives rise either to presumptuous confidence or to religious dejection, and that is to suppose that assurance is necessary for salvation. This is a great and grievous error, entirely opposed to the teaching of Scripture, and drawing the soul away from Christ. It is asserted that in order to have saving faith, we must be assured of salvation; in other words, we must believe that we are saved. But faith is certainly not a belief in our own salvation, but a confidence in the ability and willingness of Christ to save; that we personally are saved may be an inference drawn from a consciousness of possessing

saving faith, but it is not an element in the faith itself. If a man is not saved, his believing that he is saved is a falsehood and cannot alter the case. Saving faith has reference solely to Christ, whereas, according to the above erroneous notion, it has reference to ourselves. And therefore it is that we are not to be too much cast down if we feel that we do not possess the confidence of salvation. Assurance is a blessing to be prized, but is not attained by all believers. There are many of God's best saints who are destitute of it.

Another cause giving rise to a fear that we may come short of heaven, is making the experience of others a test of our own. This is a fruitful cause of religious despondency. We feel that we do not possess that spiritual experience which we have read of in books or heard expressed by some of our religious acquaintances. Thus we sometimes read in devotional books of a certain defined process of spiritual experience, through which a man must go before he attains to peace. Some can even trace the occasion and mark the day of their conversion; that at a certain time and in a certain place they accepted Christ. Such experience is by no means the experience of all. The Holy Spirit must not be tied down to one manner of working; nor must the experience of others be made a test of our own. Some are brought to Christ in a striking manner; they are

arrested in the midst of a sinful career; they can point to the circumstances of their conversion. But others are gradually and lovingly drawn to the Saviour; they have been trained up to religion from their youth; the Spirit's influences have descended upon them noiselessly like the gentle dew; and they can point to no special occasion and fix on no particular time when they were brought to Christ, they cannot recollect a period when they did not think on religion.

We ought not to be constantly looking to ourselves, either for grounds of acceptance with God, or for reasons of confidence. The great matter is to trust Christ implicitly with the salvation of our souls. He is able to save us. His blood cleanseth from all sin, and He ever liveth to make intercession for us. He is invested with the power of omnipotence, and all our enemies cannot prevail against Him. And He is willing to save us. He gave up His life for us, He shed His own blood for our redemption, and now in heaven He is actively engaged in accomplishing the salvation of His people. Let us then place our reliance on Christ. We may not be assured of our own salvation, but let us be assured of His ability and willingness to save; and thus let our personal assurance rest not on ourselves, but on His finished work.

Despondency arising from vain strivings after

holiness is a very common source of spiritual dejection among many serious persons. They have truly aimed at leading a religious life, tried to be in the fear of the Lord all the day long, cultivated holy graces; but they feel themselves always defeated. They make no progress; on the contrary they have reason to fear that there is a sensible retrogression. They form many holy resolutions, but these are of a transient nature, and are soon forgotten and broken. They are continually vexed with formality in their religious services. Outbursts of temper, inadvertent words, grievous inconsistencies, fightings within and fears without, disturb their peace and give rise to desponding thoughts.

Now this despondency may arise from putting too much stress upon feeling and the strong working of pious affection. Some make their religion to consist merely in feeling—in the excitement of the affections. And hence it is when they feel any temporary depression of feeling, they are apt to despond and to write bitter things against themselves. Now certainly it is very desirable to be in a lively frame of mind, to experience strong love to Christ, joy in the Lord, and great enlargement in prayer. But our peace ought not to change with our feelings. Our feelings are variable; they depend, not merely on the state of our souls, but on the temper of our

minds and on the health of our bodies. They are more lively in youth than in age, when there is a sensible decline of emotional power. True religion consists not so much in feeling as in fixed principle; in a willingness and readiness at all times to obey the divine command. That servant who faithfully performs his master's commands with equanimity of temper, is to be preferred to him who is subject to impulses, and who performs his work by fits and starts. It is in the inclination of the will toward God that genuine religion consists.

Despondency may arise from erroneous views of the nature of Christian progress. Some suppose that Christian progress consists in a deliverance from a sense of sin—in such a growth of religious feeling that the sense of imperfection is diminished, and the man becomes sensible that he is more and more freed from sin. Now in one sense this is the case; Christian progress consists in a greater freedom from sin; but it does not necessarily follow that the Christian should be cognisant of this freedom. It is true that the believer is not so great a sinner as he once was, but he feels his sins the more; he possesses a deeper and truer knowledge of the hidden evils of his heart; actions, which once he regarded as indifferent, are now seen by him to be sins; and states of mind to which he formerly paid no attention, are now

regarded as offensive in the sight of God. True religion is a striving after, rather than an acquisition of holiness. We must be continually pressing forward, aiming after a standard of piety still far in front of us. "This one thing I do," says St Paul, "forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Failure is the constant experience of the Christian. And the reason of this is because the standard which Christianity sets before us is very high and indeed completely unattainable in our present state. It is the example of Christ, the perfect character of the Son of God. Now the more we advance in true religion, the more we shall discern the perfection of this standard, and consequently the further our removal from it, and hence it is that the constant sense of shortcoming, the depressing feeling of failure, the conscious and continual presence of indwelling sin, are apt to discourage us in the divine life, forgetting that this is the necessary condition of the Christian life in this present imperfect state.

A feeling of dissatisfaction with our religious character is a Christian virtue. We ought to be continually lamenting the weakness of our faith, the coldness of our love, the vanity of our thoughts, and the feebleness of our religion. We cannot

attain to what we wish; our efforts are too often ineffectual; and the work effected is marred and incomplete. Even with our strongest efforts we come far short of perfection. To do good we know not, but to do evil is continually present with us. Herein consists the great difference between the Christian's condition on earth and his condition in heaven. On earth he is always hungering and thirsting after righteousness—aiming at a state of perfection beyond his reach. But in heaven "he shall hunger no more neither thirst any more"; he shall have attained to the perfection of his nature. On earth he is always dissatisfied with his religious condition and character; but in heaven all believers may appropriate to themselves the words of the Psalmist, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness."

XXVII

BESETTING SINS

THE meaning of the old English word beset is to surround, to hem in on all sides, to enclose. In this sense it is evidently used in Scripture, where it is said, "Thou hast beset me behind and before"; "Strong bulls of Bashan have beset me." The sin which besets us is the sin which surrounds us, encumbers us. Hence then a besetting sin is a sin to which a person is most inclined, into which he is most apt to fall. That which is the ruling passion of our life, which asserts a governing influence over our character, which forms part and parcel of our moral being, which is our characteristic feature and which distinguishes us from other men, in a word, that sin which we most often commit, is our besetting sin, which hinders us in our Christian race.

It is evident that the besetting sin varies according to our character. What is a besetting sin to one man, is not a besetting sin to another. A man may have no temptation to drunkenness, and therefore has no credit in abstaining from it;

whereas the love of money may exert a commanding and most pernicious influence over him. One man's besetting sin may be sensuality, another's avarice, another's extravagance, another's selfishness, another's ambition, and another's anger. To take our illustrations from Scripture. Jacob's besetting sin was deceit; this caused him to defraud his brother of his blessing and afterwards to impose upon his father-in-law. Jealousy seized upon Saul, destroyed the fair promises of his early manhood, converted the once generous monarch into a gloomy tyrant, and deprived him of his reason. Covetousness was the besetting sin of Judas Iscariot; it so took possession of his soul that he pilfered the small treasure of the disciples and sold our Lord for thirty pieces of silver, and effectually ruined his own soul for time and eternity. All these are illustrations of what is meant by besetting sins—sins to which men are most inclined, failings which exercise most influence over their character and conduct; so that we call one man passionate and another covetous, according as passion or covetousness is his besetting sin.

Every one has a besetting sin—a sin which exercises greater influence over him and effects more harm to his moral character than any other sin. But here lies the great evil that we are in general ignorant of our besetting sins; there is

a difficulty in ascertaining them. Other men know them better and can fix more precisely upon them, and can name them with more exactness than we ourselves. Sometimes the besetting sin, as in the case of vices, is so manifest and palpable that the man cannot close his eyes to it, but generally, in the case of those possessed of a good moral character, it is hidden and concealed. Just let us ask ourselves, What is my besetting sin? What is that fault which exercises the greatest influence over me, and by which I am oftenest led astray? In general we will be unable to give any definite answer, or, if we decide, there is the probability that we will decide wrongly; that we will fix upon some fault or failing which, after all, is not our ruling passion. Nor is it difficult to discover a reason for this ignorance. Our besetting sins have so engrained themselves into our character, have become so fixed and stereotyped as habits in the soul, that they have become parts of ourselves; they are habitual to us, and on this account undiscernible. Besides self-inspection is the most difficult of all tasks; we can with comparative ease judge our neighbours, we can scrutinize their character, we can disentangle the motives of their conduct, because our attention is fixed on what is external to us. But when we come to judge ourselves we get confused and become partial; our feelings colour our judg-

ment, and impatience hurries us to a hasty conclusion.

However there are marks by which our besetting sins may be ascertained. What we are most ready to detect in others is in general our own special fault ; we project our faults into others ; our moral judgments are the shadows of ourselves ; if we are suspicious of others it is a proof of the dishonesty of our own character ; if we are apt to attribute mercenary motives to the actions of other men, it is an evidence of our own mercenary disposition ; the jealousy which we ascribe to others is but the reflex of our own jealousy and envy. So also what we extenuate in others and make excuses for, is often what we ourselves are guilty of. We have become so accustomed to our besetting sins that we have lost the sense of their moral enormity; the sins to which we are not tempted appear to us heinous, whereas the sins to which we are inclined appear lesser violations. We view these sins through coloured glasses, and these coloured glasses are our own character. What we most shrink from is in general a besetting sin; thus when a man is accused of that which is his prevailing fault, when there is a correspondence between the accusation and his character, when the sore part of his moral character is touched, then he becomes sensitive, he is most loud in his excuses and most warm in his resentments.

Let us consider some of the evils attending besetting sins. They impede our progress. Besetting sins are as a weight carried by the runner, or as a loose flowing Oriental garment which must necessarily impede the progress. The Christian may be eager to run the race set before him, but his besetting sin is continually dragging him back, preventing him making progress, frustrating his efforts, and rendering fruitless all his resolutions. Many true Christians exert even a pernicious influence through some defect of character or bad habit. Besetting sins may be compared to a chronic disorder which is always present, keeps the body in an unhealthy state, weakens its powers, prevents its exertions, and is the constant source of annoyance and irritation.

Besetting sins accumulate guilt. Such sins are the most constant, the most numerous, the most permanent; indeed they have become so habitual to the soul that the man may even be unconscious when he commits them. When we do things from habit, we do them without deliberation and without effort. Thus besetting sins are constant sins; to adopt the illustration already given they are like a chronic disease which has become fixed in the constitution and settled itself there, poisoning the spring of life. These sins may not be, when separately considered, heinous transgressions; each one may be only a slight violation of the law of

God, but innumerable slight violations may accumulate a heavy load of transgression as a multitude of particles of sand may constitute a mountain. We are ill qualified to weigh guilt. We look upon a single act of open wickedness as an enormous transgression ; yet in the eye of God, the righteous Judge, it may not be so enormous in respect of guilt as a vast multitude of smaller transgressions. We who are moral in our conduct but are under the dominion of a besetting sin, may be even more wicked than the publican and the sinner.

Besetting sins obscure the spiritual vision. They act as a film upon the eye of the soul, so that the man who is actuated by them is blind and cannot see afar off. His judgment is obscured, his conscience is perverted, and his moral perception of good and evil becomes diseased. And thus men walk in a vain show, and by a strange delusion mistake dreams for realities and realities for dreams. Just as when a mist has settled upon external nature, the sun is obscured and hidden behind a curtain of clouds, and the objects of the world around us—the hills and the trees and the buildings—are veiled from the view or are seen in all manner of distorted shapes; so our besetting sins act as a mist and conceal from us the Sun of righteousness, and envelop everything spiritual in darkness and give us distorted views of the

great realities of eternity. It is only the pure in heart that can see God, and therefore if our hearts become impure and defiled by sin, God Himself will become invisible, or at least our conceptions of Him will be perverted.

When the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us," he prescribes to us a very difficult task. There is the difficulty of ascertaining our besetting sins, and until we ascertain them it is of course impossible to lay them aside; we must know our faults before we can correct them. There is the difficulty of overcoming them after their ascertainment; we may never again commit a particular sin into which we have once fallen; a man who has allowed a profane oath to escape his lips may never swear again; but habits of sin are not so easily set aside, a chronic malady is not so easily cured. There is the difficulty of changing the desires of the soul; besetting sins have become rooted in the disposition; they are in general favourite sins; we may ascertain them; we may contend against them; but, if the will is on their side, judgment and conscience may not be able to prevail. To change the disposition; to love what we now hate and to hate what we now love; in a word, to relinquish our besetting sins, is as our Saviour compares it, like to the plucking out

of a right eye or the cutting off of a right hand.

And therefore the first and chief method by which we may get rid of our besetting sins is prayer for the divine assistance. We must have greater wisdom and power than our own to discern and overcome these besetting sins. The eyes of our souls must be enlightened with divine illumination in order to know these sins. It must be one of our most earnest prayers: Lord, make me to know myself, reveal to me my character, the true state of my soul, what really are my besetting sins. This is a very solemn prayer to make; an answer to it will certainly humble and abase us, perhaps confound and overwhelm us; but such knowledge is essential, the first step in conversion is this conviction of sin. And especially we require divine assistance to change our disposition, to revolutionise our character, to cause us to detest these besetting sins which we now nourish and cherish; and without divine assistance this cannot be done; we cannot change our disposition, because our disposition is ourselves. We must pray with the Psalmist, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."

We must exercise moral courage. The necessity of divine assistance does not exclude or supersede co-operation on our part. Grace is imparted to us in the course of the performance of duty. We

must add to our faith virtue, that is courage. Moral courage is necessary in even wishing to know our sins; it will be a very humbling disclosure; it will bring us down from our pedestal of pride and self-conceit. Just as a merchant, whose affairs are involved, shrinks from the balancing of his accounts and from the examination of the state of his finances, and exercises moral courage in setting himself to that task; so is it with the man who fears that all is not well between his soul and God, and who dreads the disclosure of his true condition and the disturbance of his peace. Moral courage is also exercised in searching for these besetting sins; in going down with the candle of the Lord into the depths of the soul; in judging and condemning oneself. But above all, moral courage is necessary in fighting and contending against these besetting sins, in wrestling with those principalities and powers and spiritual wickednesses in high places.

Nearly allied to this moral courage is a holy determination of will. Having ascertained what are our besetting sins and having resolved to overcome them, we must brace our minds to a strenuous opposition to them; we must be determined never to yield to them; in short, all peace between us and them must be for ever broken. And this determination of will must be seen in committing ourselves to a contrary mode of

action, doing the very opposite to that which our besetting sins incline us.

In all our endeavours we must exercise a firm reliance on Jesus Christ. Union to Christ is the source of all spiritual strength. It is from Christ that we derive all our strength for the performance of duty and the resistance to temptation; and if we trust in Him suitable supplies of grace and strength will be communicated to us, adapted to the duties in which we are engaged and to the conditions in which we are placed. Christ's grace is sufficient for us; His strength is perfected in weakness. We ought then to take all our besetting sins and bring them to Christ. Thus it is that we are to go forward in the strength of Christ, "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." We must ever co-operate with divine grace; we must work, because God worketh in us; we must stretch forth our paralytic arms, because Christ commands us. But over and above this, there is a certain committing ourselves into the hands of Christ, a certain waiting for the influences of divine grace, a certain entrusting Christ with the healing of our spiritual diseases, which we would do well to discover and to practise. The strong Son of God is mightier far than all our enemies. Let us trust in Him; and, armed with His strength and supported by His Spirit, we shall at length obtain the victory;

the flesh shall wax weaker and weaker, and the spirit stronger and stronger. And in heaven the victory will be complete; the carnal mind will be destroyed; no obstacles will impede our progress in holiness; we shall for ever be delivered from the bondage of corruption, "from sin for ever free and, clothed in spotless purity, redeeming love adore."

XXVIII

THE MEMORY AND ITS RESUSCITATION

"THE heavens," says the Psalmist, "declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork." The study of the human body alone is a convincing proof of the existence and perfections of God. But there are no less manifest proofs to be found in the study of the human mind. Here there are marks of design as marvellous, of contrivances as beneficent, and of wisdom as profound, as are to be seen in the material universe. Our mental faculties, the reason which searches into truth, and whose domain extends to the fixed stars, the imagination which creates ideals of beauty and majesty, the memory which preserves the past as in a storehouse, the conscience which presides as an authoritative judge of right and wrong, and the affections which constitute at once the dignity and responsibility of man, bear the impress of the divine image even more strikingly than does the material world, because God is Himself a

Spirit. These are properties or qualities of the mind, faint resemblances of the perfections of the Godhead. And one of the most important of these qualities is the memory which treasures up the past, preserves all that has passed through the consciousness, ready for future use; so that past deeds and past thoughts spring again into existence, either as painful recollections to disturb our peace, or as pleasant memories to tranquillise our troubled minds.

Let us meditate on the recollection of our past lives. There are innumerable pleasant memories, and perhaps the most pleasing form which this takes is the memory of mercies and deliverances. We should make this a matter of personal experience, and retrace without egotism the history of our past lives as the ground of gratitude to God. Some can recall great mercies conferred—mercies which have brightened our lives and converted them into a blessing—mercies not only great but unexpected which have occurred without any effort of our own. Even our disappointments have been converted into mercies. We may have set our affections on some object; that object was denied to us; we have failed in our pursuit; at the time we became sad and disheartened; but as years rolled on, and as we now look back upon it, we have reason to bless God for disappointment and failure, and to discern that the gratification of our

wishes would have been a curse, whereas their refusal was the greatest blessing that could be bestowed. And many of us can remember remarkable deliverances from danger—escapes from perilous situations, recoveries from serious diseases, and what are still higher blessings, deliverances from temptations, being rescued from a life of sin and moral degradation.

There is the memory of departed friends. There are few who have reached the age of twenty, who do not possess these memories; death takes away those we love and thus dissolves our friendships. Our friends do not cease to be; death is not their annihilation or extinction; they have gone before us to another world, and we shall soon follow after. They have merely gone on a journey to an unknown country—a journey which we ourselves must take. And if we have reason to hope that they are now in a better world, then their memory is one of our most blessed associations. So also we possess the memorials of the departed, perhaps some tokens of their affection, some letters written by those who are now lying in their tombs, recollections of conversations with them or of journeys taken by their side. We delight to recall the olden times—the days of childhood—when the family circle was still unbroken, when all assembled around the family altar, and read together from the blessed Book,

and knelt together before the throne of grace—the recollection of years long passed away.

There is also the memory of crises in our religious life. Such crises happen in the lives of most men, generally occurring in the season of youth. We then feel the power of the world to come; conscience is awakened; religious impressions are excited in the soul; we are led to ask ourselves the question, What is the condition of our souls before God? What are our prospects with regard to another world? Happy are they who can date from such crises their conversion; that then they came to a fixed resolution to serve God; that then they embraced Christ as their Saviour; that then perhaps they drew up a form of self-dedication to God. Such crises are impressed upon the memory and cannot be forgotten. Jacob could never forget that night which he spent at Bethel, with the stone for his pillow and the vault of heaven for his curtains; when he vowed his vow to take the Lord as his God. And so also we may remember the place and time when a similar crisis passed over us, and when we were permanently affected by it either for good or for evil; when we came forth changed for the better, or it may be, more hardened in sin and less sensitive to religious impressions.

But there are not only pleasant but unpleasant memories—memories of things which we would

gladly forget. There is the memory of great sins committed. These cannot be forgotten ; they arise from time to time in the chambers of the memory as the spectres of the past. When a man has committed some great sin—when he has lied or cheated or seduced another such a sin is written indelibly on the tablets of his heart. It weighs heavily upon his conscience and is constantly disturbing his peace. He may have managed effectually to conceal it from others ; the world may know nothing about it ; but he cannot conceal it from himself. It says to him : 'I will go with thee whithersoever thou goest ; I will never leave thee ; think not to escape from me, I am wedded to thee for ever.' And it is its very secrecy that oppresses the spirit. If the man had the boldness to confess it, to give it outward shape, he would feel relieved.

But unless in the case of some grievous sin—some sin either of peculiar enormity or from its circumstances of a peculiar nature, sins are generally forgotten. There are many sinful actions and words, and a still greater number of sinful thoughts that appear at least to have totally escaped our memory—buried in the records of the past, like some dusty volumes lying forgotten in an old library. This may partly arise from the frequency of sin ; one sin causes us to forget another. Were sins rare, they would stand out as memorials of

wickedness not to be forgotten. But such is the extreme depravity of our nature that one sin so rapidly succeeds another that it obliterates the traces of its predecessors. Hence it requires an effort of memory to recall our past sins, to bring them forcibly to the tribunal of conscience. And this effort must be made. The recollection of past sins is most unpleasant, but it is salutary, it nourishes humility and excites to penitence.

Sometimes circumstances recall past sins. The sins themselves may have been committed years ago, and during that long past forgotten; but a circumstance, a word, a look, a thought may recall them, showing that they are not really forgotten, but merely stored up in the memory to be ready to come forth when bidden as witnesses against us. Thus it is that our sins often find us out. We may have committed them years ago; we may have forgotten them; but circumstances arise, and they come forth as unwelcome guests, they rise up as fearful phantoms, and we are forced to exclaim: 'Verily we have sinned; we are verily guilty of such and such actions, therefore is this distress, this evil come upon us.'

But there are not only sins of commission, there are also sins of omission. We have not only done those things which we ought not to have done, but we have left undone those things which we ought to have done. Think how often we

have neglected duties, restrained prayer, left off the perusal of the Word of God, omitted the duties of public worship, have gone through our religious exercises in a formal manner. Think how often we have been uncharitable and hard-hearted and unkind, refusing to listen to the cries of our sorrowing brethren and to stretch forth to them a helping hand. Think on our selfishness, our indifference to others, our want of loving sympathy to our neighbours. There is the memory of opportunities neglected. We have had many opportunities of salvation, there have been awakening times, seasons of special manifestations of divine grace, times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; but we have allowed them to slip by unimproved; or, if for the time we were impressed, instead of nourishing these impressions, we have suffered them to be effaced. Sometimes the Spirit was at work within us; those crises of life, of which we have formerly spoken, may have occurred to us, those tides in the affairs of men; but instead of seizing upon them, of taking them at the flood, we have neglected them, and they have left no lasting impression upon the soul. There is the memory of broken resolutions. We have often formed good resolutions to live truer lives; to consecrate ourselves wholly to the service of God, to aim at a nobler Christianity. But these resolutions were hardly made when they

were broken; instead of progressing, we seem to fall back in the divine life; we find from painful experience that when we would do good evil is present with us. And thus when we look back upon our past lives, we see them marked by failures, by promises unfulfilled, by broken vows, and by abandoned resolutions.

It is a solemn consideration that nothing which has passed through our consciousness is really forgotten. The memory is not a grave where the dead past buries its dead, but a storehouse where past actions are preserved in safe keeping, ready at any time to be brought forth. Some complain of their forgetfulness, but really there is no forgetfulness; our actions, our words, our thoughts are all eternally preserved. There will be a terrible resuscitation of the memory. We see symptoms of this even in this world; memories of events and persons of former years which to all appearance had been totally forgotten, arise within our minds, we know not how. Even in our dreams things start up to our recollection which we had not thought of for years. The roll containing the past history of our lives will be unfolded, and all the actions which we have committed, and all the words which we have spoken will be found written therein.

And especially we sometimes find that on a sick-bed, and above all on a death-bed, the memory,

so far from decaying, is active and busy. The man is about to be arraigned before his God and Judge; he is about to be examined concerning the deeds done in the body; his conscience is awakened and his sins are made to pass in dark array before him, the whole transactions, it may be, of a misspent life are recalled.

In another world, in that world to which we are all incessantly and without pause travelling, memory will be strengthened. We shall exist not only with all our faculties entire, but increased in power, divested of the weaknesses occasioned by the body, pure spirit, unconfined by matter, for even our very bodies will be spiritual. There are no waters of Lethe of which we may drink, and obliterate the recollections of the past. Most of us would desire that our past actions, being so predominantly bad, were entirely obliterated—that our past lives should never be recalled. But it cannot be; the waters of Lethe are a pagan myth. There are other waters of which we must drink; the waters not of forgetfulness but of recollection, and with clear heads and unclouded memory we will retrace our past lives. At death forgetfulness ceases and memory is aroused. The great store-house of past deeds and words is opened up, and a full blaze of light falls upon our actions. We are then as it were placed on a lofty eminence, and with telescopic vision can retrace our past

history—all is spread out, like a landscape before the eye of the soul. In this world a partial forgetfulness mercifully shades and veils our past actions; but in the world beyond the tomb, shadows fade and veils are rent, and memory reasserts its power, and our actions are seen in the light of day.

To the saved—to the inhabitants of heaven—this resuscitation of the memory is not a dreadful consideration but the occasion of much of their happiness. There are pleasant memories which they can cherish. There is the recollection of good works, the cup of cold water given to Christ's disciples, the self-denying actions for the sake of Christ, it may be the turning of many to righteousness, all of which shall be rewarded by the divine approbation. It is true that there is also the recollection of sins, the memory of wrongs committed, of trespasses against God and man; these are indeed unpleasant memories; but the knowledge that they are forgiven sins, that they are blotted out of the book of God's remembrance, that they have been atoned for and expiated by the sufferings of Christ must increase the gratitude of the redeemed toward the Saviour who shed His blood for their salvation. Thus the very recollection of past sins augments to the redeemed the sense of God's redeeming love to them, displays in a clearer light the exceeding greatness of Christ's love, and

is the occasion of that song of praise to the Lamb which is hymned throughout eternity and fills heaven with gladness. If the saints in heaven were not redeemed sinners, they could not sing the song of Moses and the Lamb; it is the recollection of their sins which enables them to do so; and thus the resuscitation of the memory is the cause of the gratitude of the saints.

XXIX

THE DARKNESS AND LIGHT OF DEATH

THERE is a great mystery about death. No monarch is so absolute, so irresistible, so universal in his sway. It pervades all nature; not only does man die, but all the lower animals and all the vegetable creation. And what is this death? Wherein does it consist? With regard to man we say that it is the separation between soul and body; but this is merely a declaration of our ignorance. View death in its immediate effects. Here is a man with whom we lately conversed, in whose joys and sorrows we shared, in whose intercourse we took intense delight; but now he is dead; his voice is no longer heard; his hand returns not the pressure of ours; nothing remains of that intelligent being but a lifeless body. There is a mysterious withdrawal of the man; he is no longer with us; there is no response, no answer to our questions; he is gone, we know not whither. And thus it is that sometimes life appears to us but a dream, and our intercourse with those who are gone but as the

visions of the night. Death viewed simply by itself apart either from other considerations, apart from those circumstances which often attend it or those consequences which follow it, is very dark and mysterious.

But if death is thus mysterious in itself, it is still more mysterious when we consider it in connection with the circumstances which accompany it. There are deaths accompanied with the decay of mental powers. There is an intimate connection between the body and the mind, and it generally happens that what impairs the one impairs the other. The mind is weakened by disease and rendered incapable of the same exertion as in health. There are also numerous diseases which deprive us of the exercise of our faculties, as the delirium of fever when reason is for a time extinguished. And there are other diseases attended with mental weakness, when the rational powers gradually decay and the man is reduced to the imbecility of a second childhood. There is hardly a sadder and more humiliating sight than to see a man who, when in health was eminent for the strength and acuteness of his intellectual faculties, gradually losing them, until he is to all intents and purposes dead before his soul quits the body. Here we see the darkness of death. The man is cut off from rational reflection, at the very period when reflection is most necessary for him.

Think also on the separations occasioned by death. It is love and friendship that constitute the happiness of human life; this is what makes life a blessing to us. The interchange of reciprocal affection often converts this lower world into a paradise. We live in each other; our affections are so interwoven with those of others, that it would seem impossible to separate them. But death has no regard to friendship. A man may preserve his fortune till the day of his death, but a man cannot so long preserve his friends. There is no shrine of friendship so sacred which death will not invade; no bond so strong which it will not sever; no communion so delightful which it will not interrupt. Now in all these dead we ourselves die. A part of our life and of our heart is buried in each of their graves; and thus by the death of one whom we tenderly loved, an inexpressible sadness is thrown over life; the darkness of death has settled upon it; and thus life itself becomes almost insupportable.

Think also how it often happens that the useful are cut down, whilst those who are perfectly useless to society and the world are spared. How often do we see a man, whose life is most useful, perhaps the father of a young family, the only support of the household; or it may be a public-spirited man, influential in the district in which he lives and a promoter of all benevolent objects;

or an eminent member of the Church of Christ who has been blessed above many in the conversion of souls, suddenly cut down in the prime of life, when, humanly speaking, there were many years of usefulness still before him. Through a crowd of insignificant beings whom it spares as if in disdain, death proceeds direct to this man, and lays him in the dust; it extinguishes a bright light in the terrestrial firmament. On the other hand, how often do we see men who are useless members of society, cumberers of the ground, it may be promoters of evil, corrupters of our youth, and centres of moral poison throughout the circle in which they move, spared to carry on a long life of wickedness and crime. There is a mystery here which we cannot fathom, a darkness with few rays of light to illuminate.

Hitherto we have considered death in itself, or as accompanied with those evils which usually attend it; we have restricted ourselves to it as a phenomenon connected with this world. But this is a meagre view of death; it is when viewed as connected with a future state that it assumes a gigantic importance. Death, as the end of temporal life, is a grave consideration; but death, as the entrance to eternity, is an event of tremendous consequence. Notwithstanding the disclosures of revelation how dark are our conceptions of a future state! The soul, we are in-

formed, is immortal; the body shall rise again; our future destinies will be fixed; there is a reward to the righteous and punishment to the wicked. But wherein consists the happiness of the righteous and the misery of the wicked? What the nature of the intermediate state, when the soul is separate from the body? What the constitution of the raised body? Where shall the soul be when the last breath is drawn, and the last sigh is uttered? To what unknown regions has it taken its flight? Upon what new career of existence has it entered? All is darkness; these questions remain unanswered; an extreme awfulness rests upon our condition beyond death.

To the heathen especially, who had not the light of revelation, and who consequently were without any certain hope of immortality, death must have appeared a dispensation of utter darkness. They knew themselves to be the victims of inevitable death, and beyond, all darkness. The utmost that they could attain to was the sentiment which Socrates expressed when about to die: "It is now time for me to die, and for you to live, but which of them is best, God only knows." And so also the same remark holds good with those whose hopes are bounded only by the present, who have no firm belief in or only a painful dread of a future state, unless indeed they live like the beasts without reflection and the consciousness of futurity.

But there is not only the Darkness but also the Light of death. It was the dying words of Goethe, "Light, more light." Whether it was a demand for material light or, as is generally taken for granted, the light of the soul—the light of truth, we cannot tell, but after uttering these words he died, and his request was granted. What great discoveries shall be made at death! Think on it. We are then ushered into another sphere of existence. We are then brought face to face with the future world. We then see what is now the unseen. We then discern the great realities of religion—the disclosures of revelation—the destinies of souls—the future abodes of happiness or woe. We then see God as He is, and Christ and the spirits who are now invisible, and those who have gone before, and great realities of which we can form no conception. We then shut our eyes to this world and open them in the next, and enter upon another state of being, and solve those problems which now perplex us, and discern those mysteries which now overwhelm us. What great strides shall we then make in knowledge, knowledge of God, knowledge of Christ, knowledge of the future state. "Then we shall know even as also we are known." Death then is not a land of darkness; it is a region of light; it is a revelation of great and unspeakable mysteries. It is as great a change as if one who was born blind should open

his eyes to the beauties and glories of this lower world. Light does not rise gradually, but when the darkness is at its height, it rushes with a full tide into the soul.

Death then is darkness, and death is light. There is both the darkness and the light of death. Death is a phenomenon which has two sides. There is one side which is toward this world; viewed on this side death is darkness, a mystery which we cannot fathom, an enigma which we cannot solve. All is mystery about it; in itself, in its accompaniments, in the separations effected by it, in its consequences, all is dark and mysterious. Its very light—the disclosures concerning it in revelation — is as darkness. Questions arise which we cannot answer, difficulties which we cannot solve. But there is another side which is toward the world beyond the grave, and if we could get a view of it, as each of us shall, we would see that death is light, disclosure, a revelation, a true apocalypse. We shall then see face to face. We shall then be as one carried from one room which is dark to another room which is full of light. Death then is like a statue which has two faces; the one face, looking toward this world, which is dark, horrible, forbidding; and the other face, looking toward the next world, which is light, knowledge, truth.

In whatever light we view it, whether as regards

this world or as regards the next, death is a matter of supreme importance. It is a solemn thing to die; it is an awful thing to die in an unprepared state. We can only prepare ourselves by humbly repenting of our sins, renouncing all dependence on ourselves, confidently believing on the Lord Jesus, and actively endeavouring to live a holy life. Habitual dependence on Christ, faith in Him is what is required of us. Let us firmly believe on Him and entrust our souls to His care, and then let us conscientiously perform whatever duties are laid upon us and aim at holiness of life, and pray earnestly unto God for His pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace; and although, in view of the momentous realities that accompany it, we may never be able to regard death without fear, yet when our time comes to die, we will be enabled to entertain the humble hope of eternal happiness in the heavenly world.

There is no greater means of unworldliness than the thoughts of death. It is a universal leveller; it tears away the rich man from his riches, the student from his books, the ambitious from his honours, the sensualist from his pleasures. A walk in the churchyard will do much to moderate our desires and repress our passions. We tread on graves, some of them with tombstones merely indicating the names of those buried beneath, others without any mark to designate them. We

know them not. And yet these dead once played their part in the world. They had their trades, their professions, their desires, their joys, their sorrows; some of them may have been rich, and others may have been learned; some of them may have made a great stir in their day and generation. But the grave has swept all their actions into oblivion. Who this man was, whose inscription we read, we cannot tell. Now such will be our fate. A mound of earth, a headstone, an unknown name, will be all that remains. Why then should we be so taken up with the things of this earth which will so soon fly from us? What will our riches, our books, our pleasures do for us in a few more years? Lay no stress on these perishable things. Go and talk with the dying about their riches, their houses, their lands. Ask them what delight they now have in these things in which they consumed their lives, and in the pursuit of which they perhaps shortened their days. They will reply to you, if not in the words yet in the sentiment of the Psalmist: "Surely men of low degree are vanity and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity." It is things visible that are dreams and things invisible that are realities; let us then beware of mistaking dreams for realities and realities for dreams; a mistake which when it is too late, the light of death will disclose.

XXX

CHRISTIANITY THE SPIRIT OF A SOUND MIND

CHRISTIANITY recommends itself to the reason by the evidence which it presents. Christianity is not merely a religion of the feelings ; it appeals to the intellect ; it is truth, and truth can only be discerned by the reason. Christianity demands of no man an unreasoning assent to its claims, but it rests these claims on the evidences which it produces of their truth. These evidences are varied, numerous, and convincing. There are the miracles which Jesus and His disciples performed as guarantees of the truth of their statements, and which miracles were testified to by eye-witnesses who sacrificed their lives for the testimony they delivered. There are prophecies, predictions of events uttered hundreds of years before their occurrence, as for example the chain of Messianic prophecies and the agreement of these prophecies with the events said to be their fulfilment which prove a supernatural interposition. There are the internal evidences—the morality of the Gospel, the

divine Spirit which pervades its declarations, the pure and exalted revelations which it contains, the absence of all that is polluting and degrading which disfigures the writings of the ancients, taken in connection with the limited opportunities of the authors of these writings—all of which demonstrate that the Gospel is not of human origin. There is the breadth, the universality of the religion of Christ which qualifies it for becoming the destined religion of humanity. All these evidences appeal to our reason, demonstrate the supernatural origin of Christianity, and prove that we have not followed cunningly devised fables, but that in assenting to its truth and subjecting ourselves to its influences we are actuated by the spirit of a sound mind.

But the great evidence of Christianity, which as the sun concentrates all the other evidences into a focus, is the Person of Christ. Christ is not only the Author of Christianity but He is Christianity itself. He is there revealed as God manifest in the flesh, as the object of our supreme worship. His character, as made known to us in the four gospels, is that of a perfect man, exhibiting every virtue without defect and without redundance, and commanding the approbation even of the bitterest enemies of revelation. His mighty works are the evidences of His supernatural dignity; His miracles appear as the ordinary actions of His life;

the blind receive their sight at the touch of His hand, the lepers are cleansed by His word, when He walks upon the sea its waters support Him, a few loaves multiply in His hands, and the dead come out of their graves at His command. But the greatest of all His miracles is His own resurrection. Although crucified through weakness, although apparently the prey to death, although buried in Joseph's sepulchre, yet death had no power over Him. Surely then in bowing the knee in lowly adoration to such a Being; in reverencing Him who is fairer than all the children of men, we are actuated by the spirit of a sound mind.

Christianity is a religion which demands our attention by the momentous nature of the disclosures which it makes. It announces that this life is but a preparation for another and that the actions which we do in this world will fix our condition in the next; that we have entered upon a life which will never die; that death is not extinction, but that we are formed for eternity; that we are sinners, both by nature and wicked works, and that as such we are in a state of condemnation; that Jesus Christ came to save sinners; that His death on the cross was an expiatory sacrifice, and that all who believe in Him and are united to Him will be saved from wrath and admitted to heaven. Here our eternal interests are at stake. As then it is the mark of a wise man to make

provision for the future; as we regard the young as acting a very foolish part who trifle away the precious years of youth in folly and vanity without laying a foundation for a useful manhood; as we consider it unreason to sacrifice the future for the enjoyments of the present; so it is not soundness but unsoundness of mind to prefer the pleasures of time which are but for a season to the happiness of heaven which is without end—to risk the soul's salvation for anything which this world proffers—to prefer the muck-rake to the immortal crown.

Christianity recommends itself to our reason by its adaptation to our religious nature. Man possesses a religious nature; there is an innate sense of God within him; just as the eye discerns objects of vision, and the ear objects of hearing, so does the conscience discern God. Man may stifle this religious faculty, but he can only do so by violent efforts; atheism is unnatural to man. Now man, as a religious being, is possessed of religious wants. He longs for God, the living God. He feels that he is a sinner; the fear of a future reckoning often takes possession of him; and hence he requires forgiveness and a sense of restoration to God. He feels also that he is frail and fallible, that passion often obtains the mastery over him, that he is often led astray and thus does things which reason disapproves; and hence he feels the need of some commanding

principle to overcome those evil propensities and to preserve him in the paths of rectitude and duty. Now the Gospel is adapted to all his religious wants; it heals all these spiritual diseases. Jesus Christ came to reveal the Father to us. He has brought a perfect remedy for our moral malady; by His atoning death He procures pardon for guilt, and by the influences of His Spirit He procures holiness for depravity. Christianity is not like many other religions confined to one nation or to one class of persons; it is the religion of humanity, its principles lie deep in human nature; it is adapted to man as man, and not to any adventitious circumstances in which man may be placed. Paul preached the same gospel to the cultivated Athenians as he did to the foolish Galatians. It is equally suited to the rich and to the poor, to the old and to the young, to the learned and to the unlearned, to the wise and to the unwise, to the cultivated European and to the savage African. As light is adapted to the eye, and as sound is adapted to the ear, so is Christianity adapted to man.

Christianity recommends itself to our reason by its having been embraced by some of the wisest of the human race. The loftiest intellects have bowed with submission to the religion of Jesus; the profoundest philosophers have done homage to the doctrine of the cross; the subtlest men of

science have not only been convinced of the truth of Christianity, but have been actuated by its living spirit. At the period of the Reformation, the ablest men who were the moving spirits of their age were men of high religious attainments. Among the Reformers, Luther, Calvin and Melancthon stood as high in intellectual capacity as any of their compeers. And not to mention the great theologians of the Church, whose vast acquirements commanded the admiration of the age in which they lived, and whose lives proved that they were actuated by the spirit of that religion, whose truths they defended and whose doctrines they expounded, we have other illustrious men who were eminent alike for their mental energy and their Christian character. We need only mention Oliver Cromwell, who by the force of his mighty genius exalted himself to the highest position in the land, and raised his country to be the first among the nations; Milton, the greatest of English poets; Sir Isaac Newton, the greatest of English philosophers; Samuel Johnson, the mightiest intellect of his age, and who ruled as king among men of letters; all these were men who were deeply imbued with a religious spirit, and who bowed their knee to Jesus as their Lord and Master. And, notwithstanding the infidelity of the period there are in our own age men of exalted position and great talents; our two greatest

poets, Tennyson and Browning, Faraday the great electrician, Sedgwick the great geologist, and Livingstone the greatest of modern travellers, who were also distinguished for their piety. Some of our greatest statesmen and lawyers, as Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Cairns, Lord Selborne and Mr Gladstone were men actuated by the spirit of Christianity, and who felt it living within them as the source of all their best actions. And even in the heathen world their greatest men were those who were actuated by religion, "seekers after God." The brightest names in heathendom were theists in the best sense of the term; Christians before Christianity.

But what of Him who is the Author of our religion? Viewed as a mere man, apart from His divine nature and supernatural works, Jesus the Son of Mary, the Jew born in Bethlehem in the Augustan era is the wisest, the greatest, the most wonderful man who ever trod this earth. His wisdom is unapproachable, His intellect is unrivalled, His character is unstained, His influence transcends that of all other men put together; the wisest sayings of Socrates are not to be compared with the sayings of Jesus; the discourses of Plato, those masterpieces of heathen philosophy, pale before the discourses of Jesus as recorded in the last chapters of St John's Gospel. There meet in Jesus the three great elements of the Christian

spirit in their highest state of perfection; power and love and soundness of mind—all are combined and constitute the human spirit of Him who is the greatest among the sons of men.

Christianity recommends itself to our reason by the beneficial influence it exerts on those who embrace it. Think on the improvement which Christianity has effected on the moral character of men, converting sinners into saints, reforming the debased, speaking peace and comfort to the despairing, pouring the balm of consolation into the afflicted spirit, and inspiring the dying with hopes of happiness in another world. Think on the moral dignity which it confers on those who are actuated by it, their patience in suffering; their unselfishness in prosperity, their zeal in the performance of good works, their humility in an exalted position, their fidelity in their earthly duties, their unquestioned veracity, and their loving and gentle spirit. Think on the heavenly motives it inspires, the high ideals it sets before us, and the lofty aspirations it suggests. Think how it smoothes the ruggedness of some men's characters, how it transfigures them and causes even their very countenances to shine. Surely a religion so beneficial and so blessed, and which so recommends itself to human approbation must be actuated by the spirit of a sound mind.

We must cultivate the spirit of a sound mind in

our religion. Reason must be combined with faith, otherwise our religion is irrational and superstitious. The head ought to be clear as well as the heart pure. And over and above this we must in our words and actions exercise a Christian prudence, not needlessly offending others, or allowing our zeal to get the better of our judgment. Whilst we are harmless as doves, we should at the same time be wise as serpents. The spirit of a sound mind must also be combined with the spirit of power exercising an influence in the world and with the spirit of love exerting that influence for good. Let us live while we live, real, earnest, living lives; and show the soundness of our mind and the wisdom of our choice by seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

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